

Homework Assignments

- Instructions: Observe the tongue provided by your instructor and describe his tongue body color and tongue coat in not less than 30 words.



Tongue Diagnosis

- Inspection of Tongue Proper (p.210-219)
- Tongue Quality

Inspection of Coating Proper: Thickness

- Coating proper refers to the substance of the tongue coating, namely, how thick the fur is and whether it is moist, greasy, curdy or exfoliative.
- **Thickness:** judged by whether it can reveal the tongue body or not. If tongue body can be seen clearly through its coat, it is thin coating, otherwise, it is considered as thick coating.
- By observing the thickness of the coat, practitioner may determine the location of the disease, and the prosperity or decline of the pathogens.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Thickness

- Thin coat indicates exterior syndrome in exopathy, or light internal injury syndrome as a reflection of the fact that the disease is not very serious since pathogenic factors are only on the exterior, that the vital qi has not been impaired and that pathogenic factors are not prosperous.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Thickness

- **Thick coat** indicates **serious** pathogenic factors and **deep** location of the disease. It is due to **retention of phlegm and undigested food** causing stomach qi together with turbid qi to rise upward and accumulate on the surface of the tongue.
- If the *thin coat becomes thicker*, it suggests that the disease is taking an *unfavorable turn*; if the thick coat becomes thinner, it shows that the vital qi is suppressing the pathogenic factors.

Inspection of Coating Proper: *Moisture*

- The tongue coat being moist or dry refers to the degree of dryness or moisture of the coating of the tongue.
- Normal tongue coat should be a little bit moist, neither slippery nor rough suggesting the patient's body fluid not yet consumed though he falls ill.

Inspection of Coating Proper: *Moisture*

- If the retention of water is excessive, and saliva is ready to drip (drool), it is regarded as slippery coat, which indicates cold or dampness syndrome, caused by invasion of the interior by cold-dampness, or by stagnation of phlegm-dampness in the interior due to insufficiency of yang unable to resolve the abnormal fluid which accumulate in the body or float upward onto the surface of the tongue.

Different cases of slippery coat

- Slippery coat indicates phlegm and fluid, or edema in the body. A cold pathogen will not consume water but injure the yang-qi resulting in spleen yang or kidney yang deficiency which cannot transport excess water away.
- White and slippery coat: damp syndrome
- **Yellow** and slippery coat: **dampheat** syndrome
- Thin, white and slippery coat: cold and dampness syndrome
- White, slippery and **greasy** coat: **phlegm** dampness syndrome
- **Yellow, thin** and slippery coat: **dampheat** syndrome, or *exterior cold pathogen* started to transform to heat syndrome, but the body fluid still not consumed too much.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Moisture

- Dry and withered coat: tongue coat without any fluid is dry coat; coat that feels dry and unsmooth is termed rough coat. Both dry and rough coat are due to a consumption of the body fluid by excessive heat. They occur when deficiency of yin fluid and stagnation of pathogenic dampness obstruct yang qi which fails to draw away any excess fluid. Dry and fissured coat is hard, rough and choppy coat, mainly caused by excessive fire-heat or heavy consumption of the body fluid that consequently failure to keep the coat moist.

Clinical Manifestation of dry coating

- If the dry coat is caused by **fever in exterior syndrome**, upon touching, the tongue coat will feel dryness and rough.
- The patient himself will have thirsty and dry mouth.
- In case of **internal injury**, the symptoms include: consumption of yin fluid, constipation, scanty and dark urine.
- Upon testing by cotton bud, the surface on the tongue coat still retain a thin water film indicating the scarce amount of water left. This is the sign of dampheat has not yet subsided.

Inspection of Coating Proper: *Moisture*

- Changing of body fluid in the interior can be learned by observing whether the coat is wet or dry. e.g. when the moist coat turns dry, it indicates a serious consumption of the body fluid by **excessive heat**; otherwise, it indicates subsided heat and replenished body fluid.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Greasiness /Curdiness

- Wane and wax (increase or decrease) of pathogenic dampness and yang qi can be learned by observing whether the coat is greasy or curdy.
- It is curdy coat if the coating of tongue is composed of thick and coarse granules loosely scattered like a layer of bean curd dregs, which can be easily scraped off. Curdy coat occurs because **excess yang heat steams up the turbid qi in the stomach**, which in turn, rises and accumulates on the surface of the tongue.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Greasiness /Curdiness

- Curdy coat is presented in the syndrome of retention of indigested food in the stomach and intestine, the *syndrome of stagnation of phlegm in the interior*, or **internal carbuncles** and ***aphthous stomatitis*** due to damp heat.
- If the coat is thick and sticky like pus, it is called “festered curdy coat”, found in pulmonary abscess, stomach abscess and liver abscess. It indicates serious disease and internal carbuncles due to excessive pathogenic factors.

Curdy coat

- The tongue coat appears as pieces of dry bean curd on the top of the tongue, being thick but loose which can easily wiped off, Syndrome indicated: food stagnation, turbid phlegm.
- Thick coat with coarse and loose granules: food stagnation and turbid phlegm but still got stomach qi
- Thick coat with large granules but loose: Turbid pathogens accumulating inside the body and erupt outward through stomach yang. It indicates that the kidney yang is still strong stomach yang and kidney yang.
- Usually white and curdy coat belongs to heat syndrome.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Greasiness /Curdiness

- Rotten-curdy coat is the tongue coat covered with a layer of thin white membrane, or grain like points. It is often found in syndrome of damp-warm, acute febrile disease caused by virulent heat pathogens and in disease due to latent summer-heat, dysentery with bloody stool, and syphilis. ***Rotten-curdy coat shows exhaustion of the stomach qi and unfavorable prognosis.***

Inspection of Coating Proper: *Greasiness /Curdiness*

- If the coat is smooth and fine with evenly distributed grains difficult to scrap off, it is greasy coat, often caused by excessive pathogenic dampness, obstruction of yang qi and the consequent stagnation of pathogenic dampness on the tongue. Greasy coat indicates damp pathogen, retention of phlegm, retention of indigested food and damp heat pathogens.

Greasy coat

- Greasy coat means a layer of turbid and smooth mucous covering the top of tongue coat which can hardly be removed.
- Syndrome indicated: Food stagnation, phlegm retention and dampness and turbid qi.
- Usually appear in the middle portion of the tongue with small granules and cannot wiped away easily.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Exfoliation

- Exfoliative coat is given when the tongue coating suddenly comes off completely or partly. Different terms are given according to the site, state and range of the exfoliation, namely, 1-frontal exfoliative coat, 2-middle exfoliative coat, and 3- **scattered exfoliative coat** (the coat is incomplete with fragments of coating here and there while the place without any fur is very smooth) 4-**lingua geographica coat** (like a map) and 5- *mirror-like tongue* (no coating at all, and as smooth and glossy as a mirror).

Inspection of Coating Proper: Exfoliation

- Exfoliative coat is formed as a result of impairment of the stomach yin and qi, deficiency of yin and exhaustion of yin-fluid, and deficiency of both qi and blood, or as a result of an allergic constitution.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Exfoliation

- Non-serious exfoliative fur indicates deficiency of qi and blood not severe, but mirror-like tongue is due to impending exhaustion of the stomach qi and stomach yin, showing unfavorable prognosis of dying vitality.
- Modern research proved that **exfoliation of fur** is mainly associated with an **insufficiency of enzyme** and vitamins, and with a
- **dysfunction of the pancreas and the liver.**

Inspection of Coating Proper: Existence

- The existence and disappearance of fur can show not only the sufficiency or deficiency of the stomach qi, but also the conflict between the pathogen and vital qi, as well as their changes.

Inspection of Coating Proper: Existence

- For example, the *gradual disappearance* of the coating is indication of *insufficiency* of the stomach qi and stomach yin, and the gradual decline of the vital qi, whereas the **reappearance** of thin and white fur after exfoliation denotes a **domination** of the vital qi over pathogenic factors and a recovery of the stomach qi. *The appearance or disappearance should be gradual rather than abrupt as the latter reflects a sudden aggravation of disease.*

Existence and Subsidence of Coating Proper

- The uprising and subsidence of the tongue coating show the excess and dispersion of the pathogens
- If the coating changes from thick to thin, means dispersion of pathogens; if **thin to thick**, then **more accumulation**.

Existence and Subsidence of Coating Proper

- Usually the subsidence would start from the margin to the middle part. The thicker coat needs 2 to 3 days to subside.
- **Thick** coating refers to thick so **unable to see the bottom color**, showing increase pathogen invasion and deep invasion position; thin coating usually means exterior syndrome, disease not serious yet.

Homework Questions on the Tongue Coating

- 1. What is indicated by the symptom of thin and white tongue coating but the middle is yellow in color?
- 2. What is meant by the symptoms of getting the whole tongue with thick tongue coating?
- 3. What are the possible causes of a patient suffered from exterior syndrome having the tongue coating suddenly disappeared?

Class Activity 1: Observation of Tongues

- Look at the tongue of your classmate of opposite sex.
- Describe the color of his/her tongue.
- Compare the tongues of other classmates and identify the most special tongue today and describe.

Tongue Diagnosis

- Inspection of the Shape of Tongue (p.215-p.219)
- Inspection of the Motility of Tongue
- Clinical Significance of Tongue Diagnosis

Inspection on Shape of Tongue

- Shape of tongue refers to the features shown by the tongue as flourishing or withered, coarse or fine, fat or emaciated, prickled, fissured.
- Pathologic shapes of the tongue are displayed as **swollen**, *emaciated*, prickled, fissure or having **teeth prints**.

Shape of Tongue Body: Flourishing / Withered

- **Flourishing** or Withered: The tongue body being moist, red and fresh is flourishing while withering **dry, dim** colored without luster and lack of blood color is withered tongue.
- The flourishing or witherness of a tongue is an indicator to judge the excess and deficiency of the vital qi of an organism, also a criterion to assess the seriousness of the disease and its prognosis.

Shape of Tongue Body: Flourishing / Withered

- Flourishing means enough body fluid while withering means fluid deficiency, or being consumed.
- This is also regarded as the “spirit” of the tongue.
- If the tongue body is found thin, slim and withering dry, then it indicates prolonged sickness with exhausted qi and blood.

Shape of Tongue: Coarse/ Tender

- Coarse or tender: The texture of the tongue can be coarse or tender. **Coarse** texture always refers to the coarse granules on the surface of the tongue which indicates **excess and heat** syndromes. Tender refers to the fine texture and smooth which indicates deficiency and cold deficiency syndromes.
- Prosperity and moist refers to abundance of body fluid.
- Witherness refers to dryness which means injury of body fluid.

Shape of Tongue: Swelling

- Swelling of the tongue refers to the tongue that is enlarged and plump, or swollen; thicker than the usual size of normal tongue. In its mild form, it is defined as an enlarged tongue if it fills the mouth and is printed with teeth prints.
- In its severe form, it is defined as swollen tongue if it fills up the mouth and is difficult to retract, making the mouth unable to close tightly.

Shape of Tongue: Swelling

- Enlarged tongue is the result of retention of **water and stagnation of phlegm-dampness** in the tongue body, indicating insufficiency of yang, or retention of water due to qi deficiency, and up flow of phlegm and fluid due to damp heat.

Shape of Tongue: Swelling

- **Swollen** tongue results from qi and blood stasis in the **upper part** of the body due to toxic heat and alcoholism, indicating upward flow of blood-heat, offensiveness of **alcoholism** and intoxication and blood stagnation.
- Question: How to distinguish an enlarged tongue from a swollen tongue clinically?
- It is better to differentiate between coldness and heat, deficiency and excess of the disease according to the tongue color.

Cases of Swollen Tongue

- If the tongue body is pale, plump and tender, it is due to accumulation of body fluid caused by yang deficiency of the spleen and kidney.
- A light red, or reddened and thick tongue with **yellow and greasy coating**, is due to a rise of **phlegm and damp heat**.

Cases of Swollen Tongue

- **Deep red and swollen tongue** belongs to accumulation of damp heat or excessive heat toxin; if the tongue is so swollen that the mouth cannot open then it is due to excessive heat of the heart and spleen; if the patient got **unconscious**, it is the evidence of **heat entering to the pericardium (toxic carditis)**.
- **Purplish blue and swollen tongue**, due to stasis of alcoholism in the upper part of the body and blood stagnation due to intoxication.
- **Food poisoning** also has the **same tongue condition** and with **dull coloration**.