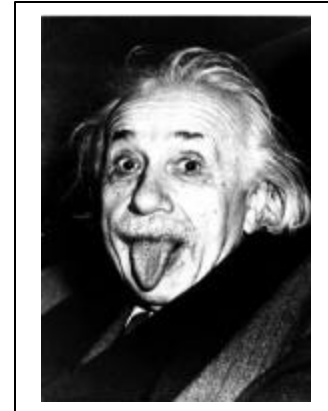


Tongue Examination

For thousands of years, visual inspection of the tongue has been a unique and important diagnostic method in Ayurveda as well as Traditional Chinese Medicine. The tongue is your window to your digestive system. There is a large amount of information that can be learned from this observation, including the health of various bodily systems, toxins within the system, emotional states, and much more.



An ideally healthy tongue will look clean and have a pink color with no white coating. However, the majority of people have a slight coating on the back of the tongue, which is a sign of toxins (*ama*) in the colon. If this is the case, you are usually generally healthy, as this is just *ama* that has built up in the stomach or small intestines and moved into the colon. It comes from undigested, unabsorbed or unassimilated foodstuff. However, if the entire tongue is coated, it is a sign of systemic *ama* throughout the gastrointestinal tract.

Tongue size and shape: A *vata* tongue is thin, small, brownish in color and looks a little dry. A *pitta* tongue is broad at the base and tapered at the apex. The tip is red and the margins are distinct and sharp. It often has a reddish or yellowish discoloration. A *kapha* tongue is large, round, glossy, and thick. It tends to be wet and relatively pale.

Tongue coating: One of the most important things to look for on the tongue is a coating. This coating is an indication of *ama*, or toxins, within the digestive system. The thicker the coating, the more the toxins. The color of the *ama* as well as the location on the tongue is an indication of which dosha is involved. *Vata* *ama* is grey or blackish-brown and is more towards the rear of the tongue. *Pitta* *ama* is yellowish-green and is in the central portion of the tongue. *Kapha* *ama* is a pale, white color and is all over the tongue. A lack of coating can be an indication of no toxins in the system, but it may also indicate high *pitta*, meaning a digestive fire which burns excessively high and can burn up both toxins and even the mucous membranes, potentially leading to acid indigestion or heartburn.

Tongue margins: If there are teeth marks or indentations along the margins of the tongue, it is a sign of chronic malabsorption. In this case, the tone of the tongue muscles becomes low and creates the teeth impressions. If the margins of the tongue are red, it indicates high *pitta* (heat), which may result in psoriasis or eczema.

Tongue moisture: A dry tongue indicates *vata* aggravation or *vata* imbalance, including anxiety and fear, resulting in dehydration. A *pitta* tongue is generally moist, while a *kapha* person's tongue tends to be glossy and wet.

Other considerations when examining the tongue:

- The tongue should not be extended for longer than 20-30 seconds and with as little effort as possible.
- Some foods will discolor the tongue, such as coffee or turmeric. Some medications can discolor the tongue also.
- Alcohol will redden the tongue body.
- Cigarettes or cigars have a drying effect upon the tongue and give a yellowish discoloration.

Sources:
Ayurvedic Tongue Diagnosis, Walter Shantree Kacera, Ph.D.
Textbook of Ayurveda, Volume 2, Vasant Lad