

## Diagnosis in TCM

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For more than 2000 years Chinese Medicine has observed the Human condition and formulated theories and treatments for everything from the common cold to more serious diseases like diabetes and stroke.

There are over a million Doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine working in hospitals in China today. Their training consists of up to 5 years study at a University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In Australia we now have Universities and private colleges offering degrees in Chinese Medicine.

But what can you expect when you visit a TCM practitioner? Practitioners have been trained to use the four TCM diagnostic methods of Inquiry, Observation, Listening/Smelling, and Palpation.

A typical first consult will take 20 to 30 minutes.

Detailed questions will be asked about your specific condition. Low back pain may be better with rest or eased after exercise, an ankle sprain may feel better after applying heat or cold or it may be headaches that occur regularly in the same region of the head.

Once the specific characteristics of the problem have been described, questions about your general health will be asked. Appetite, bowel motions, urination and sleeping patterns are all inquired about.

And while these questions are being asked, the practitioner will be observing aspects of your health that are reflected in your facial complexion, your skin texture, hair lustre, the health of your fingernails and the general shape of your body structure.

Acupuncture points or painful areas can be palpated to gain information about the health problem. Pain that is worse with pressure indicates an accumulation or stagnation of Qi (energy) or Blood (Xue) whereas pain that is relieved with pressure indicates a lack of Qi or Xue.

Then there are tell tale sounds and smells associated with different health problems. Chronic dry coughs or acute coughs with profuse phlegm. And is the phlegm clear, yellow or sticky.

Gradually a list of clinical features surrounding the health problem are assembled.

And finally the practitioner will ask to see your tongue and to check your pulse at both wrists.

The tongue gives an insight into the nature of the health problem. A red tongue body indicates heat, a pale tongue indicates a general state of weakness in body functions. And the coat on the tongue indicates the progression of the disease from acute to chronic and shallow to deep in the body.

Pulse taking in TCM is very different to modern biomedicine. Rather than just the rate, TCM has identified 28 basic pulse qualities, each associated with different internal disharmonies. For instance a rapid pulse is associated with internal heat, a wiry pulse can indicate pain and a small deep pulse is associated with internal weakness.

All of these details are recorded and then the practitioner makes a summation of all the clinical features into the TCM diagnosis.

A cough along with all the other collected information may be described as an acute Wind Heat attack.

A digestive upset with pain that is relieved with pressure and warmth and with weak pulses and a pale tongue may be described as a weakness of the functions of transformation and transportation of food and fluids.

The TCM diagnosis then allows Acupuncture points or Chinese herbal formulas to be selected that address the health problem.

The four methods of diagnosis in TCM are part of a professional health assessment that compliments the modern biomedical assessment from your GP.

In the hospitals in China patients have a choice between the traditional and the modern. Increasingly they are used in combination. With professionally trained practitioners from Australian TCM courses, patients here increasingly have a choice too.

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