Over the long term, Heart blood deficiency may lead to heat from deficiency of the Heart. Because blood is part of yin, over time Heart blood deficiency can also affect Heart yin. Both processes can be seen when the tongue tip is red and the tongue body is pale (Heart blood deficiency with flaring heat from deficiency) or there is a pathological change in the shape of the tip (Fig. 6.3.6).

The symptoms of heat or fire from deficiency of the Heart—irritability, palpitations with anxiety, insomnia, restlessness, and a dry mouth and throat—are much more pronounced in Heart yin deficiency than in Heart blood deficiency. In the former case, the tongue body will be red with a strongly discolored red tip, or there may be, in addition to a peeled coating, a long vertical midline crack.

In this chapter we will discuss the tongue signs associated with the patterns mentioned above as well as those associated with constitutional weakness of the Heart. The latter condition may contribute to the formation of heat in the Heart or to Heart yin deficiency.

In the case of Heart yang deficiency, the tongue body will be pale, swollen, and wet. Besides fatigue and exhaustion, the patient will often experience severe shortness of breath upon exertion. If Kidney yang deficiency accompanies this condition, there will also be sensations of cold in the body (Fig. 2.1.11).

Tongues Signs Associated with Constitutional Weakness of the Heart

Long Tongues

A long, pale red or pale tongue that is big but within the normal range points to a strong constitution. As a rule, tongues tend to be narrow or thin. If the tongue is very pointed towards the tip and of a reddish color, it may indicate a constitutional weakness of the Heart. If the tongue body is reddish or red and shows reddish areas on the tongue body surface, it is an indication of the presence of internal heat. Heat in the body not only dries the body fluids, it also moves qi and blood vigorously. This movement of qi and blood causes the tongue to be extended so that it will protrude further from the mouth than normal. The opposite mechanism obtains for short and pale tongues. Cold slows down the flow of qi and blood and its contracting effect manifests in a short, often contracted, tongue body.

A long, reddish tongue often appears with a firm tongue body. Long-standing heat depletes fluids and yin, which in general causes hardness, firmness, and dryness of the tongue body. On the other hand, an accumulation of yin (dampness) is responsible for a swollen and soft tongue body.

The diagnosis of heat in the Heart is confirmed by the appearance of a long tongue with a very red tip or red points on the tip. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a long tongue, which is often seen as an indication of heat in the body, in conjunction with a reddish or red tongue body. The degree of narrowness of the tongue body reflects the extent of injury to the body fluids and yin. In general, a long, reddish, and especially firm tongue indicates a tendency to yin deficiency. Further, since yin deficiency often gives rise to heat from deficiency, which readily affects the Heart, a long tongue may specifically point to an imbalance in the fire phase.
**Tongue Signs Associated with Disharmonies of the Heart**

**Symptoms**
- Raised, bleeding skin lesions
- Strong itchiness
- Soft stools
- Inability to fall asleep

**Western diagnosis**
- Lichen simplex (an eczematous dermatitis)

**Background to disease**
- Caffeine abuse
- Frustration

---

**Chinese diagnosis**
- Constitutional heat in the Heart
- Heat in the Liver
- Retention of damp-heat in the middle and lower burners

---

**Symptoms**
- Headaches
- Stomach pains with stress
- Inability to fall asleep
- Inner tension, inability to bear any emotional pressure
- Nervousness

**Western diagnosis**
- Uterine fibroids

**Background to disease**
- Repressed emotions

---

**Chinese diagnosis**
- Constitutional heat in the Heart
- Onset of Heart yin deficiency
- Heart blood deficiency

---

**Figure 6.1.1.1**
Female
22 years old

**Figure 6.1.1.2**
Female
39 years old
Tongue Signs Associated with Disharmonies of the Heart

Symptoms
Acute stomach pains
Hypochondriac pain
Heartburn
Insomnia
Restlessness
Ravenous hunger

Western diagnosis
None

Background to disease
Irregular lifestyle
Caffeine and cannabis abuse

Figure 6.1.1.3
Female
34 years old

Tongue description
Pale red
Long, pointed shape
Red tip
Vertical crack in the center

Chinese diagnosis
Normal
Constitutional weakness of the Heart
Heat in the Heart
Phlegm-fire in the Stomach

Symptoms
Inability to relax
Inner tension
Headaches with tight neck muscles
Pain and weakness of the lumbar area
Occasional numbness and tingling of the right arm
Insomnia
Fatigue

Western diagnosis
Neck pain
Primary infertility

Background to disease
Overwork
Perfectionist attitude

Figure 6.1.1.4
Female
32 years old

Tongue description
Slightly pale
Long
Vertical crack in the center with rootless coating

Chinese diagnosis
Slight Spleen qi deficiency (blood deficiency)
Constitutional weakness of the Heart
Stomach yin deficiency, onset of Kidney yin deficiency

Symptoms
Inability to relax
Inner tension
Headaches with tight neck muscles
Pain and weakness of the lumbar area
Occasional numbness and tingling of the right arm
Insomnia
Fatigue

Western diagnosis
Neck pain
Primary infertility

Background to disease
Overwork
Perfectionist attitude
Symptoms
- Stomach pain with stress
- Epigastric fullness
- Lack of appetite
- Depression
- Fatigue

Western diagnosis
- Polyps in the stomach

Background to disease
- Overwork
- Emotional problems due to death of mother and divorce in the same year

Tongue description
- Reddish, long, narrow
- Slightly yellow, thick, greasy coating

Chinese diagnosis
- Heat with injury to the fluids, constitutional heat in the Heart
- Accumulation of damp-phlegm in the Stomach

Figure 6.1.1.5
- Female
- 42 years old

Symptoms
- Atrophy and pain of facial muscles
- Complete loss of all body and head hair
- Facial eczema
- Exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Unwanted weight loss

Western diagnosis
- Atypical, progressive collagen-vascular disease

Background to disease
- Weak constitution
- Night work for many years
- Chronic lack of sleep
- Irregular eating habits
- Tea and coffee abuse
- Overwork
- Excessive use of willpower

Tongue description
- Red, very narrow, contracted
- Long, firm tongue body
- Slightly deviated
- Red tip
- Midline crack over the entire tongue body
- Old, yellow coating

Chinese diagnosis
- Severe exhaustion of Kidney yin and essence
- Lack of body fluids
- Onset of internal wind
- Heat in the Heart
- Constitutional weakness of the Heart
- Injury to body fluids due to heat from excess

Figure 6.1.1.6
- Female
- 38 years old
Case History

Mrs. H is 32 years old and runs her own architectural business. She describes herself as a perfectionist. She is thus very critical of herself and the people around her, causing her to experience constant inner tension. At the same time, she is always worried about not being successful. She connects this fear to a feeling of tension around the neck and shoulders. She works more than 60 hours a week; the lack of spare time means she eats irregularly. She also drinks a lot of coffee and sleeps very little. The physical symptoms of which she complains are headaches and tension around the shoulders and neck. She is also extremely worried about her infertility. The tongue is noticeably long and shows a rootless coating. Her pulse is slightly rapid (shuo) and choppy (se).

Analysis. For constitutional reasons, her emotional reactions give rise to heat in the Heart, as manifested in the red points at the tip of the tongue and the slightly rapid pulse. Because the discoloredation of the red points at the tip is not very severe, the heat in the Heart appears to be of recent origin, possibly related to starting her own business. However, the long tongue body reflects a constitutional tendency toward the development of heat in the Heart. Stress, a hectic lifestyle, and inner tension lead more readily to the formation of heat in those with this tendency than would be the case in individuals with other types of constitution.

The patient's irregular eating habits and excessive consumption of coffee has injured her postnatal qi, which in the long run will lead to malnourishment of Kidney yin and essence. The onset of this pathology is reflected in the rootless coating on the posterior third of the tongue, as well as the soreness in her lower back.

The vertical crack in the midline of the tongue indicates a slight deficiency of Stomach yin. Although the pale tongue and the choppy pulse denote blood deficiency, the pathology of the patient also points to the onset of Heart and Kidney yin deficiency. The sleeping problems, restlessness, and functional infertility point to blood as well yin deficiency. The occasional headaches and the tingling and numbness are related to Liver blood deficiency.

Treatment consisted of harmonizing the communication between the Heart and Kidney, and strengthening the blood and Kidney yin. Tai ji chuan, acupuncture, and herbs helped all the symptoms, including the infertility; two years later, she gave birth to a healthy baby.

Discussion. The long tongue reflects disharmony between fire (Heart) and water (Kidneys), which may in some cases be of constitutional origin. This disharmony may give rise to symptoms like restlessness and sleeping disorders that go hand in hand with deep-seated fears and long-lasting exhaustion.
6.1.2 Tongues with a Long, Vertical Crack in the Midline

A crack in the midline of the tongue is often seen as an indication of Stomach yin deficiency. The crack appears in the middle third of the tongue and is very often deep and wide. Constitutional weakness of the Heart can also present with a deep midline crack. This crack, however, is much longer than the former. It starts in the posterior third and runs to the tip or just short of the tip. If the tongue body color is pale red or normal, and if the crack is thin, there may be no pathology. The crack may simply indicate that there is possible constitutional weakness of the Heart. If, however, the tongue body is very red and the midline crack is very deep, Heart fire is probably present. If such is the case there will also be restlessness, irritability, palpitations, and mouth ulcers. If the crack is covered by a yellow, greasy coating, phlegm-fire is agitating the Heart. In this case the patient will exhibit restless agitation, a bad temper, and manic behavior. Finally, a red tongue body with a rootless or peeled coating in conjunction with a long, vertical midline crack indicates deficiency of Heart and Kidney yin.

A constitutional weakness of the Heart does not mean an organic weakness of the Heart. In those with this tongue type there is a tendency toward certain kinds of mental or emotional weakness: frequent attacks of melancholy and crying spells, emotional instability, fearfulness since childhood, depression. However, with an appropriate lifestyle, there may be no symptoms at all. Great care must be taken, therefore, when assessing the significance of this crack.

**Tongue description**

- Reddish, slightly swollen
- Long, vertical crack in the center with yellow, thin, greasy coating
- Red tip
- White, greasy coating

**Chinese diagnosis**

- Slight Spleen qi deficiency (accumulation of dampness)
- Constitutional heat in the Heart with phlegm-fire in the Stomach
- Heat in the Heart
- Accumulation of dampness

**Symptoms**

- Panic attacks with fainting spells
- Palpitations
- Severe feelings of fear
- Diarrhea with emotional pressure

**Western diagnosis**

None

**Background to disease**

- Long unhappy marriage
- Overwork
- Excessive consumption of chocolate

---

**Figure 6.1.2.1**

Female
35 years old

See CASE HISTORY below
Tongue Signs Associated with Disharmonies of the Heart

Symptoms

Sudden vertigo
Trembling of the entire body
Numb areas in the extremities
Severe feelings of fear
Tendency to catch colds

Western diagnosis
Chronic fatigue syndrome

Background to disease
Physical and mental demands of competitive sports

---

Chinese diagnosis
Spleen qi deficiency (accumulation of dampness)
Constitutional heat in the Heart with phlegm-heat in the Stomach

---

Figure 6.1.2.2
Female 35 years old

Tongue description
Reddish, slightly swollen
Long, vertical crack in the center with slightly yellow, thin, greasy coating

---

Symptoms

Pain in the jaw
Loose teeth
Severe irritability
Exhaustion
Constipation
Thirst

Western diagnosis
Osteoporosis affecting the jaw

Background to disease
Anorexia nervosa as teenager
Mental and emotional pressures at work

---

Chinese diagnosis
Normal
Liver qi constraint with heat in the Liver
Constitutional weakness of the Heart
Heart blood deficiency
Essence deficiency
Phlegm in the Stomach transforms into fire

---

Figure 6.1.2.3
Female 38 years old

Tongue description
Pale red
Slightly red and curled-up edges
Long, vertical crack in the center
Indentation at the tip
Depression at the root of the tongue
Yellow, greasy coating along the midline crack

---

© Eastland Press
**Tongue Signs Associated with Disharmonies of the Heart**

**Symptoms**
- Inability to stay asleep
- Hot feet at night
- Occasional night sweats
- Headaches
- Tightness of the neck muscles
- Blocked sinuses

**Western diagnosis**
- Uterine fibroids
- Allergic rhinitis

**Background to disease**
- Long-standing emotional problems

---

**Tongue description**
- Reddish
- Red edges
- Long, vertical crack in the center with a red tip
- Yellow, thin, greasy coating

**Chinese diagnosis**
- Normal
- Heat in the Liver
- Heat in the Heart
- Accumulation of damp-heat

**Figure 6.1.2.4**
- Female
- 38 years old

---

**Tongue description**
- Red, swollen tongue body
- Long, deep vertical crack
- Thin, white coating

**Symptoms**
- Palpitations
- Anxiety, restlessness
- Insomnia, fatigue
- Washes herself all day
- Nausea and vomiting with agitation

**Western diagnosis**
- Compulsive neurosis

**Background to disease**
- Unwanted divorce
- Loneliness

**Chinese diagnosis**
- Kidney yin deficiency with heat in the Heart and Stomach
- Constitutional heat in the Heart
- Normal

**Figure 6.1.2.5**
- Female
- 40 years old
Case History

This 35-year-old private secretary complained about her unhappy marriage of 10 years. She did not know how to improve the relationship. During this period, her panic attacks occurred more frequently and became more intense. They always started with palpitations, a stifling sensation in the chest, and sudden diarrhea. She often called for an ambulance in these situations, thinking that she had suffered a heart attack. The patient occasionally fainted when the feeling of fear became too strong. She appeared nervous and hectic but at the same time gave an impression of vitality. There was a long, vertical crack on the midline of the tongue, and the coating was thin, yellow, and greasy. Her pulse was rapid (shuo) and slightly slippery (hua).

Analysis. The deep midline crack in this case, which extends to the tip of the tongue, is not just an indication of constitutional weakness of the Heart, but also suggests the presence of heat in the Heart. The red tip and midline crack are covered with a yellow, prickly coating. This is a sign of phlegm-heat in the Stomach. Phlegm-heat disturbs the chest, which the patient described as a stifling sensation. Because it is blocked by phlegm, the clear yang cannot rise, and thus causes fainting spells. There are two mechanisms at work here:

1. Panic attacks and spells of diarrhea dominate when heat in the Heart transforms into fire.
2. When phlegm-heat is the more prominent causative factor, it will agitate the Heart, manifesting in chest pains, palpitations, and fainting spells.

Discussion. A midline crack that extends to the tip of the tongue is an indication of constitutional weakness of the Heart with a tendency to develop heat in the Heart. People with this type of tongue tend to suffer from restlessness and/or frequently lead overactive lives. If this condition is aggravated by phlegm-heat, the individual will suffer from inappropriate emotional reactions, which in extreme cases can lead to mental illness.