

Understanding Your Constitution and Condition

by **David Briscoe**

In macrobiotic counseling, two specific aspects of your health are paid especially close attention to: your **constitution** and your **condition**.

Constitution = what you were born with, and it primarily refers to your physical make up.

Your parents' genetic contribution, the season in which you were born, the geographical and environmental conditions you were surrounded by during pregnancy, and your physical development nourished by your mother's blood while in the womb are the primary factors that influenced your constitution. During this time you were being physically nourished by your mother's blood. Her blood was created by the food she ate and drank. The nutrients and the various qualities of the foods were the building blocks from which you grew from a single fertilized cell to a fully developed human baby. During this time, you increased in size by three billion times! In addition, the quality of your parents' relationship immediately preceding conception as well as during the entire pregnancy, and the parents' individual mental and emotional health during pregnancy, also significantly influenced the development of your constitution.

Although most of the constitutional characteristics are established during the time in the womb, the development of the constitution does not end at birth. The constitution continues to be established until approximately the age of five. The food most regularly eaten during the first years after birth, and the early childhood environment, are the main factors contributing to the further development of the constitution after birth.

The constitution reveals itself outwardly in many physical and non-physical ways, including the following:

Physical

- Bone structure
- The density or fragility of the bones
- Facial structure
- Proportion of facial features

- The shape and size of the ears
- The shape and size of the teeth
- Overall musculature

A person will have either a generally hardy constitution or a delicate one. This does not mean "good" or "bad". Many people with hardy constitutions can become debilitated and ill in later life if they haven't cared for themselves earlier. Those with delicate constitutions can stay healthy all their lives if they take care of themselves over the years.

The benefit of a hardy constitution is that it usually provides deep inner reserves of energy. This can be drawn upon in times of illness and difficulty and used for recovery. The drawback to a hardy constitution can be that the person is a pusher and a headstrong driver throughout life, never stopping to regularly relax or to hear the messages to sometimes take it easy that the body and life is trying to send. People with hardy constitutions often have great difficulty accepting the challenges of illness or dietary change, because they have usually been very strong and hard-working, and they have generally lived with a "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" attitude. The hardy constitution is truly wonderful, but it can be accompanied by an open or hidden arrogance that says, "I'm as strong as an ox; I can eat, drink and do whatever I want!"

The obvious drawback to a delicate constitution is that the individual may not have deep reserves of physical energy to draw on in times of need. However, on the positive side, individuals with delicate constitutions often outlive those with hardy constitutions, because those with delicate constitutions usually come to terms with their physical limits earlier in life, learning to take care of themselves over time. Also, those with delicate constitutions often have deeper inner spiritual reserves since they have had to deal with illness and physical weakness. This has given many of them a stronger will and sometimes a wider view of life than those with very hardy constitutions who have rarely, if ever, had to deal with chronic physical illness or weakness.

What does all this mean?

Generally, if you have a strong constitution, your health may be easier to establish or recover and maintain. However, as is typical of those with strong constitutions, you may also be a stubborn person who has difficulty following the advice of others or staying with a healthy lifestyle. You may have an "I've always been strong as an ox" attitude, and you may not see the real need or value of taking the time and effort to make changes in your lifestyle and food choices. On the other hand, you may very well be the kind of person who can use your strong qualities to quickly change and make choices that are of benefit to you in a variety of ways. I challenge you to

learn how to use your strong constitutional qualities for bettering your own health and personal well being.

If you have a delicate constitution, you may have a few more challenges in establishing and maintaining your physical health. You may have to be more careful and more aware of how you eat and live. Be patient and realize that it takes a little time to change. Don't worry, though, over time you may see that you have created lasting health for yourself. A delicate constitution doesn't always mean a delicate personal character. You may discover deep resources of spirit that you were unaware of in yourself. Because of these deep spiritual resources, you may very well come to find yourself outliving those who are physically much stronger than you.

Your Current Condition

Keep in mind that the constitution is like the structure of a building: once it has been built, it doesn't change much over the years. Even though the tenants may change, or the color of paint, rugs, windows, etc., may change often, the structure of a building and its inherent strengths and weaknesses are there to stay. That's very much like your physical constitution. What you have at birth in the form of your physical constitution is pretty well in place, and it doesn't change much throughout life.

On the other hand, your condition changes from day to day. Some days you feel good, other days tired. Some days you are ill, other days healthy. Some days you are a little pale, other days you have your normal color. Sometimes you feel energized, other times tired. The condition is constantly changing because the factors that influence your condition are also constantly changing. Here are the main factors that influence your day-to-day condition:

- Blood quality
- Acid or alkaline state of your body fluids
- Weather conditions
- Climate / Season
- Geographical location
- Atmospheric conditions
- Environmental conditions
- Internal energy circulation
- Social surroundings
- Current housing
- Breathing pattern
- Past and present eating and drinking patterns
- Education / Family / Parents

- Work / Career
- Physical and mental activity
- Personal happiness

Your blood quality is the main factor affecting your day to day energy and internal physical condition. Fortunately, blood quality is one thing over which each one of us can have creative control. By learning how to select and prepare food and drink, we can control our blood quality.

From your blood is produced all of the rest of you:

- From blood all of your cells are created.
- These cells gather to form tissue.
- This tissue gathers to form organs.
- Out of blood, cells, tissue and organs comes your overall physical condition.
- From your overall physical condition emerges your moods, emotions, thinking, judging ability, mental state and behavior.

The macrobiotic view is that to change cells, tissue, organs, overall physical condition, moods, thinking, behavior, etc., you have to go back to their source, the blood, and change it. In order to change the blood, we have to go back to the blood's source, our daily food.

Daily Food = Blood Quality

Changing our daily food will do more than anything else to change the quality of our blood.

The life of a red blood cell is 120 days. What you eat and drink today will be with you in your blood quality for the next 120 days, effecting the health and function of your cells, tissue, organs, and mental state. Of course, if you eat something of poor quality just once, and never again during the next 120 days, its effects will diminish over time, and the blood will recover a strong quality. On the other hand, if you eat something day in and day out, or even several times weekly, its negative effect is continuous and the blood quality stays weak, without a chance to recover a good quality. As a result, everything down the line begins to decline, too: cells, tissue, organs, bones, nerves, hormones, immunity, endocrine glands, internal functions, moods, thinking, emotions, behavior, attitude, etc., all decline.

From a macrobiotic view, the main factors determining your blood quality are as follows:

- pH: is the blood acid or alkaline?
- Na (sodium) / K (potassium) mineral balance

- Blood sugar balance
- Water balance
- Healthy functioning of the stomach
- Healthy functioning of the small intestine
- Healthy functioning of the liver
- Healthy functioning of the spleen

The current condition expresses itself in the following ways:

Physically:

Current and recurring physical signs, for example:

- Changes in normal urination and other functions of elimination
- Infections
- Weak immune function
- Fevers
- Headaches
- Weight gain
- Level of vitality
- Big appetite or no appetite
- Fatigue
- Skin troubles
- Congestion
- Vision problems
- Warts, moles, calluses
- Rashes

Non-Physical:

- Mood
- Attitude
- Quality of relationships
- Social skills

- Thinking
- Emotional Expression
- Obsessions and Phobias
- Treatment of others

Listed above are just a few of the ways that the current condition expresses itself physically and non-physically. Each person's unique condition will reveal itself in ways that are specific and unique to the person.

The current condition is an expression of the harmony or disharmony currently present in a person's life physically and non-physically. It is an expression of the excess, deficiency or stagnation that is present. The condition reveals the current internal environment of the blood, other body fluids, cells, nervous system, tissue, organs and the mind. By understanding the current condition, we can determine what actions and choices are necessary to properly practice a macrobiotic lifestyle in order to re-balance the condition.

Determining the current condition is not the same as a medical diagnosis. For a medical diagnosis, you will need to see a medical doctor. It is not the same as an evaluation by a registered dietician. For evaluation by a registered dietician, you will need to find the appropriate referral agency. In macrobiotic counseling, I am looking to the current condition in order to determine the most appropriate way for you to practice a macrobiotic lifestyle. There are many ways to practice macrobiotic living. Understanding your constitution and your current condition assists me in helping you to determine which way of applying macrobiotic principles is most appropriate for you.