

## Are You a Type C (Cancer) Personality?



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Most diseases have associated emotions. In practice, one should always look for a connection between body, mind and spirit.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), when certain organs are weak, deficient or diseased, a certain type of emotion may come to the surface. Here are the five main organs and their associated emotions in TCM theory:

**Anger:** The liver is associated with anger and symptoms displayed in the eyes (darkness around the eyes) and blood vessel pathologies (ex. varicose veins) are common.

**Worry:** The spleen is associated with worry. In TCM, the spleen governs digestion along with the stomach. When the spleen is weak, symptoms of indigestion, bloating, diarrhea, undigested food, and irritable bowel syndrome occur.

**Sadness/Grief.** The lungs are associated with sadness and grief. In TCM, the lungs control the immune system, skin, and of course, breathing. Many chronic diseases stem from unresolved grief. We could even hypothesize, according to TCM theory, that given that cancer is a failure of the body's immune system to detect and eliminate a tumor, perhaps there is a connection to grief.

**Fear.** The kidneys are associated with fear. In TCM, the kidneys govern bones, the nervous system, the lower back and the genitourinary system (kidney, bladder).

**Joy.** According to TCM, the heart is associated with joy. Though this is normally a good thing and most of us would like to have more joy in our life, the concept is best described as "excessive joy" or over-excitement. For example, when your heart is overactive in TCM, you may suffer from insomnia. On the research side of medicine, more and more studies are looking at the link between disease and behaviour and between emotions and personality types. Currently, behavioural medicine is a growing branch of medicine and is responsible for recognizing the association between "Type A" personalities (i.e. stressed, hostile, easily-angered, competitive and hard-driving personalities) and cardiovascular disease. The behavioural oncology branch of behavioural medicine is looking for similar emotional associations with cancer patients.

Recently, behavioural oncologists have attempted to conceptualize a "Type C" personality type, i.e. a personality type more at risk for cancer. Based on their findings, the following characteristics describe a Type C personality:

- denial and suppression of emotions, in particular anger
- pathological niceness
- avoidance of conflicts
- exaggerated social desirability
- harmonizing behaviour
- over-compliance
- over-patience
- high rationality
- rigid control of emotional expression (anti-emotionality)

According to behavioural oncologists, the façade of pleasantness with a Type C personality will collapse over time due to the impact of accumulated stressors, especially those evoking feelings of depression and reactions of helplessness and hopelessness. The coping style of Type C personalities, i.e. excessive denial, avoidance, suppression and repression of emotions, appears to weaken natural resistance to carcinogenic

influences.

Recent studies show that psycho-social stressors which are characterized by inadequate and repressive coping mechanisms are associated with changes in immune competency, including both humoral and cell-mediated immunity. Relationships between different immune parameters (natural killer cell activity, lymphocytes, serotonin uptake, mean platelet volume) and mood states, psychological coping styles and personality variables have been discovered.

In the case of breast cancer research, studies show that the clinical course of the disease is influenced by psycho-social factors and coping styles. Breast cancer patients have a more favourable outcome when they have a higher fighting spirit, a greater potential for aggression and lesser suppressive tendencies

Do not ignore the association between your mind and your physical symptoms. As we see from research, a symptom that is diagnosed as "only in your mind", can translate into a disease in your body! This reminds me of a cartoon I saw in a newspaper a few years back. A tombstone had the following engraving: "I told you it wasn't only in my head."