

The Benefits of Bio-Typing in Herbal Practice

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If you were at the Herb Fest this summer you may as I am still be thinking about the question that was raised by Peter Jackson-Main and some of the other lecturers 'What is Western herbal medicine?' It seems to be an important question for us at present for several reasons one of which is that by defining our tradition and approach it strengthens us and helps us in the ongoing process of legislation.

My hope in writing this article on modern bio-types is that it may contribute to this process of defining what our Western system is. I also offer this in the hope that you find as I have done that these holistic systems are very practical tools in the modern Western practice of natural healing. They are based upon scientific research and also have much in common with traditional systems of bio-typing including our local Celtic and North European traditions.

One core aspect of all herbal or traditional healing systems that helps define what they are and how they work is their use of typology or bio-typing. This is the holistic approach they use to divide people into different types that combine both physical and psychological characteristics. The constitutional types of Iridology are a good example of a relatively modern Western system of bio-typing. It is one of the few holistic forms of bio-typing that we have. You will also by now be familiar with at least some forms of traditional bio-typing in for example systems like Ayurveda (tridosha), TCM (5 Elements) and the traditional Greek 4 elements/4 humoural types. With this approach herbs, diet and naturopathic strategies (etc) are prescribed to balance the qualities of the individual persons type. This is of great value because many health problems have a significant constitutional aspect to them.

Having for many years used Ayurvedic bio-typing system in my practice I found that there were always some clients who it did not suit. This was not necessarily because Ayurveda could not help them but simply due to the fact that it did not resonate with them, and so there was low compliance. When I introduced the modern Western systems I started to get better results with these same people and I also found these systems were readily acceptable and helpful with a wide range of clients in general. As with all healing methods though they do not help everyone. I still find some clients resonate more with Ayurveda, but I use it much less now than the modern systems.

Apart from Iridology there are three other systems of modern bio-typing that I have trained to use. They can be used together. I have introduced two of them here, they are: **Somatotyping** and the **5 Bio-Types**. Somatotyping is based upon studies of human embryology and physique. The three Somatotypes are based upon the three layers of the human embryo, the endoderm, the mesoderm and the ectoderm and their corresponding body types. The 5 Bio-Types is based upon how different human evolutionary phases have developed a dominance of different endocrine glands that affect body type and temperament. Both systems use observation and questioning for diagnosis of type. I also find Iridology and Kinesiology very helpful for this along with traditional pulse and tongue diagnosis. The third method I use which I have not gone into in here is **Metabolic Typing**. This is based upon research into the effects of certain foods on blood sugar levels and pH (yin/yang) and how this has a profound influence on physiology as a whole.

These modern systems all show in scientific terms what a well known saying has informed us of for years *'One man's meat is another man's poison.'*

Somatotyping: This form of bio-typing was researched by Dr. William. H. Sheldon¹ (1898-1977) a remarkable American psychologist who studied different body types to see how they influence physiology, behaviour, dietary preferences and psychological traits etc. His work on different body types was linked with that of C.J. Jung² on different psychological types and they were found to have many similarities. When I first came across the three Somatotypes I was struck by how similar they were to the tridosha of Ayurveda and also with our local Celtic and North European traditions.

Different people have differing ratios of these three extreme Somatotypes types, which are: The **Endomorph** that is focused on the digestive tract and tends to be rounded and soft with a concentration of mass in the abdomen. They tend to parasympathetic nervous system dominance and potentially weak thyroid glands. They are extraverted and friendly, they have a love of relaxation, comfort, food and people. Their bodies tend to be less able to efficiently digest/metabolise carbohydrates³. They are high in the elements of earth and water and comparable to the kapha dosha of Ayurveda and the phlegmatic type of the Greek tradition.

The **Mesomorph** tends to a more angular body with a focus on musculature and the chest area. They are assertive and love action, good at rational thinking and are extraverts. They tend to a dominance of the sympathetic nervous system although they can also function in a more balanced responsive way between sympathetic and parasympathetic. They tend to problems with digesting/metabolising lipids³. They have higher levels of the fire element in general and are comparable with the pitta dosha of Ayurveda and the choleric type of the Greek tradition.

The **Ectomorph** is a more delicate build with light structure and a thin body. Due to the relatively large body area in relation to mass they tend to suffer from extremes of temperature. They tend to be intuitive, and introverted, like privacy, reflection, are

restrained and have a highly developed sense of self-awareness. They are more likely to have a dominance of the sympathetic nervous system. They are likely to have a problem with digesting/metabolising proteins. They are higher in the elements of air and ether and similar to the vata dosha of Ayurveda.

The 5 Bio-Types: This system of typing is based upon the development in understanding the influence that endocrine glands and hormones have on human physical and psychological characteristics. The pioneering research of the American scientist Roger Williams⁴ on endocrine glands has had a large influence in this field. He found that the size and weight of glands varied enormously and that this variation had a considerable influence upon metabolism. He felt that this variation was responsible for many of the differences between 'normal' people, he called this 'Biochemical Individuality'.

In the 1960's H.G. Bieler⁵ realised there were three main glandular types, the Adrenal type, Thyroid type and the Pituitary type. Each had different physical and psychological characteristics. Further research has added the Gonadal type and the Pancreas type, and also a dual type the Gonadal-Pituitary. In the UK the well-known naturopath Roderick Lane⁶ has pioneered the development of this form of bio-typing.

In my practice I use the system of bio-typing developed by Roderick Lane⁶ because this is the one I have trained to use. The following is an introduction to the 5 bio-types mainly based on his system:

The **Pituitary or P type** is also known as the **Pathfinder**. They are the tallest and tend to long lean flattish bodies and strong joints. They are influenced more by growth hormones and pituitary dominance. Their weakest gland is often the adrenals. Typical P types are Jeremy Paxton and Una Thurman. They tend to be cool headed and stoical. They often crave dairy products because prolactin stimulates the pituitary, but this causes increased craving. They are better off with a big breakfast and meals with plenty of natural protein, whilst avoiding foods altered by man, gluten, dairy products (except yoghurt and butter) and potatoes.

The **Thyroid or T type** is also known as the **Hunter Gatherer**. They are of a more moderate build and size (usually shorter than a P type) and tend to be lean and graceful. They are more influenced by thyroid hormones and their weakest gland is often the pituitary. Typical T types are Princess Diana and Terrence Stamp. They tend to be more sensitive and charming. They crave sugars but they are not good for them. They should avoid refined foods, saturated fats, margarine and other modern foods. They are suited to a Hunter Gatherer type of diet e.g. high in natural protein/low fat, lots of raw veggies and fruits. This type may find it difficult to thrive on a purely vegetarian diet.

The **Adrenal or A type** is also known as the **Pioneer**. The A type has a strong build, compact and muscular with a prominent chest and rear. They are usually shorter than the T type.

They are more influenced by adrenal hormones and their weakest gland is often the thyroid. Typical A types are Russell Crowe and Catherine Zeta Jones. The men are often Alpha male or 'salt of the earth' types, tend to impatience, like structure. They often crave salt. They should avoid it however along with stimulants, refined foods, alcohol and red meat. They are best with whole-grains and fruit and vegetables in season. They usually do well on a 'food combining' diet.

The **Gonadol type or G type** is also known as the **Farmer Gardener**. Whereas the others above have all evolved before humans settled permanently in one place this G type is more suited to a settled and agrarian diet. They tend to be short figures, with short legs in relation to the rest. They are usually soft and rounded, the men more hairy, the women with large chests. They are influenced more by oestrogen or testosterone. Typical G types are Bob Hoskins and Dolly Parton. They are nurturing and loyal, protective and make ideal nurses. They have slow metabolisms so need light foods that are easy to digest. Suited to vegetarian or vegan diets. They crave spice but should avoid highly spiced foods, red meat, high fat foods and anything rich in hormones, or contaminated with Xenoestrogens.

The **Gonadol Pituitary or GP type** this dual type is known as the **Dancer**. This type is a modern development that has evolved since people have lived in urban communities. As the name implies they have a mixture of characteristics. They tend to be medium or short in stature, but lean and strong like ballet dancers. Typical GP types are Michael J Fox and Anne Robinson. They are often determined with a quick wit and a wacky sense of humour. Like the P type they often crave diary products but they should avoid them unless it is sheep or goats milk produce that is often beneficial for them. They are more suited to a light breakfast and lunch with a bigger meal in the evening.

Please keep in mind that each type has many more characteristics and recommendations than I have introduced here. For more details see below.

References and Supportive reading:

On Somatotyping:

1. W. H. Sheldon: 'The Varieties of Human Physique: An Introduction to Constitutional Psychology.'
1. W.H. Sheldon: 'Varieties of Temperament: A Psychology of Constitutional Differences'.
2. C.G. Jung: 'Psychological Types'.
3. Dr. Dennis Thompson: 'Ayurvedic Zone Diet' ISBN 0-914955-85-3
For more details of the Somatotypes and the work of Dr. W.H. Sheldon and C. G. Jung I also highly recommend you visit the website: www.innerexplorations.com

On glandular bio-types:

4. Roger J. Williams: 'Biochemical Individuality'. University of Texas Press.
5. H.G. Bieler: 'Food is Your Best Medicine'. University of Texas Press.
6. Roderick Lane and Sarah Stacey: 'The Adam & Eve Diet'. ISBN 0-340-81935-9

For more information on bio-typing in general I highly recommend you visit the website:
www.holistichealthtopics.com

Another site that has some interesting pieces of research that discusses the various pros and cons of different diets is www.beyondveg.com

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