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Convex-shaped Pulses

by Jimmy Wei-Yen Chang, L.Ac.

As Master Chang mentioned in his previous article, "The Three Basic Components of a Pulse", a complete pulse sign consists of **shape**, **jump**, and **level**. The shape of a pulse describes its structural topography; the jump of a pulse describes its pulsation aspect; the level of a pulse describes the depth in which the pulse is felt. For a complete pulse picture and to reach a diagnosis, all three of these components must be determined.

Shape, the structural topography of a pulse, can be grouped into four categories: 1) Convex-shaped, 2) Straight-wiry, 3) Concave-shaped, and 4) Shapeless.

Convex-shaped pulses are pulses that bulge upward and/or outward. The lengths of these pulses vary from 0.1-2.0 cm. Convex-shaped pulses are usually indicative of pathology in the vessels (stagnation) of the organs, or growth or mass reflected by the position of the pulse. Convex-shaped pulses, from shortest to longest, are as follows:

- Bird's beak (~0.1 cm)
- Bean (~0.3 cm)
- Short = *Yangming* pulse (~0.5 cm)
- Convex (~1.0 cm)
- Tent (~1.0 cm)
- Spindle (~1.0 cm)
- Turtle (~1.0 cm)
- Rainbow (~1.5-2.0 cm)
- Sea turtle (~1.5-2.0 cm)
- Bump (various lengths)

Bird's Beak

Bird's beak, the shortest of all the convex-shaped pulses, is approximately 0.1 cm in length. This pulse feels pointy like a pen's tip and is usually found on the deep level of the left *guan*, left *chi*, or right *chi*. When bird's beak pulse is found on the left *guan*, it indicates gallstones; when it is found on the left or right *chi* position, it indicates kidney stones in the ureters (not in the kidneys) of the corresponding side.

Bean

A bean pulse feels like a small round BB. It is shorter than the width of one pulse position, approximately 0.3 cm in length. The bean pulse denotes stagnation. If the bean pulse is soft, it feels like a pimple (soft and bulging) and can be pushed away when pressure is applied. The harder the bean pulse, the more solid the stagnation (mass) and the harder it is to dissolve. A hard bean pulse can indicate a tumor or possible cancer.

Short

A short (aka *Yangming*) pulse, like the bean pulse, is shorter than the width of one pulse position, but it is slightly longer than the bean pulse at approximately 0.5 cm in length. A short pulse also denotes stagnation; however, since a short pulse is longer/bigger than the bean pulse, the stagnation (mass) is larger than that indicated by a bean pulse. A hard short pulse can also indicate a tumor or possible cancer.

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Convex

A “convex pulse” is usually used to describe a bulging pulse found in the *guan* position. It is approximately 1.0 cm in length (the width of the *guan* position). The jump of this pulse is usually forceful. If this pulse is found on the right *guan*, it indicates acid reflux, H. pylori, or stomach pain. If it is found on the left *guan*, the emotional aspect of the Liver is involved.

Tent

A tent pulse describes a convex-shaped pulse that collapses upon pressure. The shape of this pulse is like a yurt – round on top, but empty underneath. Its length is the width of one pulse position, which is approximately 1.0 cm in length. This pulse is an indication of deficiency in the area corresponding to the pulse position in which it appeared.

Turtle

A turtle pulse is essentially the same as a convex pulse except it is found on the *chi* positions, is 3-D (but flat on the bottom), and has a “tail”. The “tail” of a turtle pulse is a thin, forceful pulse that extend proximal to the *chi* position. Turtle pulse generally indicates swelling from inflammation with conditions such as soft tissue injuries with the “tail” of the pulse indicating disk problems and neuralgia. A forceful turtle pulse denotes an acute inflammation with severe pain, whereas a weak turtle pulse denotes a chronic condition with less inflammation and pain. If a turtle pulse is felt on both *chi* positions, it is an indication of prostate enlargement or varicocele.

Spindle

A spindle pulse is similar to a turtle pulse; it is a convex-shaped pulse that is 3-D and its length is the width of the *chi* position, which is approximately 1.0 cm in length. The difference is that the bulge of a spindle pulse can be felt from all sides, thereby indicating that the inflammation and swelling are more severe than what is indicated by a turtle pulse.

Rainbow

A rainbow pulse describes a convex-shaped pulse that extends distally beyond the *cun* position and is about 1.5-2.0 cm in length. Its jump is forceful; its diameter is thick and expanding. Rainbow pulse is usually found distally to the left *cun*, indicating gas, bloating, enteritis, food poisoning, and other Small Intestine signs and symptoms.

Sea Turtle

A sea turtle pulse describes a rainbow pulse that is found and extends proximally beyond the *chi* position. Like a rainbow pulse, its jump is forceful and its diameter is thick and expanding. The indications of a sea turtle pulse are similar to that of a turtle pulse.

Bump

A bump varies in length. It is a convex-shaped pulse that is found between two pulse positions – either between the *cun* and *guan* positions, or between the *guan* and *chi* positions. A bump denotes stagnation between the upper and middle *jiaos* if it is found between *cun* and *guan*; it denotes stagnation between the middle and lower *jiaos* if it is found between *guan* and *chi* positions.

In summary, convex-shaped, bulging pulses indicate qi and blood stagnation, but more specifically, stagnation, mass, and obstruction. The pulse position on which the convex-shaped pulses appear provides an indication where the stagnation/mass/obstruction is located in the body. In general, the stronger the jump of convex-shaped pulses, the more acute, inflamed, blocked, stagnated, or painful the condition. Soft convex-shaped pulses are usually temporary and the stagnation or mass are light. Conversely, regardless of their sizes, the harder the bulge of convex-shaped pulses, the harder the stagnation, the more compact the mass, and the longer it will take to dissolve.

About the Author

Master Jimmy Wei-Yen Chang has over 25 years of concentrated clinical experience applying his expertise in differential diagnosis and herbal prescription. The author of a pulse diagnosis manual, *Pulsynergy*, Master Chang currently pursues his specialties in private practice in Hacienda Heights, California, and is widely recognized for his skills in correlating expert pulse taking and herbal prescription.

To learn more about pulses and herbs, Jimmy Chang is speaking on the following topics for Lotus Institute. All classes are approved for 8 CEUs/PDAs by the CA and IL Acupuncture Boards and NCCAOM; pending approval for FL and TX Acupuncture Boards.

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