

What Type are you? The 5 elements

By Jill Blakeway

Do you prefer soft floating fabrics or something more structured and formal? Do you love being by water or prefer walking in the country? Are you quick to anger or someone who keeps things bottled up? Are you naturally lean and muscular or is your body more curvy and rounded? Do you come alive in the summer sun or are you someone who loves to cocoon all winter? Are you a night owl or up with the lark? Do you crave sweets or is it the salty taste that has you rifling through your fridge late at night?

The ancient Chinese philosophers looked to the natural world to find a way of describing how we are similar, yet unique. They discovered that pretty much anything in the world could be broken down into five energy types, which they called the Five Elements.

WOOD | FIRE | EARTH | METAL | WATER

These elements play a pivotal role in many forms of Eastern thought.

- In Feng Shui they are used to achieve balance so a space heals and nurtures or one element is emphasized to attract a specific energy.
- In Macrobiotics they help a cook create a balanced meal that supports health and reduces cravings or to prioritize one specific element to heal a health problem.
- In Chinese medicine they are used to diagnose disease and the resulting treatment plan will either emphasize a weak element or sedate an excessive element to restore balance and order in the body.
- In Chinese astrology they play a role in understanding a person's constitution.

There's a little bit of all five elements in each of us, but we all have a dominant element and this is said to be our Five Element Type. Our type is something we're born with and has gifts as well as challenges associated with it. My patients find it helpful to understand their element and many have told me that it comes as a relief to know why they are the way they are. They find that it helps them be more accepting of their "faults" when they see them as part of a package. A Wood Type, for instance, can have a bit of a temper but is also very direct and productive.

Personally, when I realized I was an Earth Type I stopped being so hard on myself. Earth types have softer, rounder bodies and for years I tried to diet against my type to no avail. Once I understood my type, I was grateful for the gifts that come along with it. Earth Types are empathetic and good listeners, which helps me be good at my job. I'm never going to be skinny but with the right diet, I'm healthy and proud of my curves.

So, what type are you?

The descriptions below should give you a clue. I've kept them brief but there's much more to say and I encourage you to read more if you're interested. There's plenty of good information on the internet. One concept that I'd like to touch on is that each element relates to the other four elements in such a way that it can be used to heal and balance them. This is way the elements are used therapeutically in Chinese medicine. So for instance water element foods tend to moisten and cool the body so they are particularly helpful for Fire Types who tend to be dry and overheated.

The Wood Type

To understand the wood type you only have to imagine a tree. Trees tend to compete aggressively with the other trees around them when growing and become steadfast and solid. Likewise Wood Types are determined, Type A people who seek out challenges and do well under pressure. Competitive and adventurous they love novelty and movement. Spring is the season of the Wood type who is drawn this season's new starts, growth and possibilities.

Wood Types tend to have thin, lean bodies and move with grace. Their faces tend to be long and thin with a long nose, a broad high forehead and slender cheeks.

They have a strong sense of purpose but can become driven and stressed when out of balance. This means that Wood Types can be irritable, frustrated and impatient and suffer health problems such as PMS, high blood pressure, tight muscles and headaches. Being wound up sometimes makes the Wood Type crave alcohol or other unhealthy ways to relieve stress.

Advice for Wood Types

- Balance your strength by noticing when you get stubborn and learning to be flexible
- Take time to play and "smell the roses" and find a healthy stress relieving activity such as tai chi.
- The organ most associated with the wood type is the liver so wood types should avoid alcohol and include sour foods in your diet to stimulate the liver.

The Fire Type

Imagine a roaring fire and you will have some idea of what kind of person is a Fire Type. They are energetic, passionate, dramatic and have a tendency to be emotionally volatile. Fire types love to talk and are known for being eloquent and expressive although they can sometimes talk too much or too quickly. They are energetic, charismatic people who approach life with an enthusiasm that is infectious. They make great leaders because of their ability to “fire up” other people.

Willowy and well-proportioned with delicate hands and feet, fire people may have ruddy complexions and prominent cheek bones. They sometimes have red hair and freckles.

The season associated with the Fire Element is summer with all its fun and excitement. Like the summer, the emotion most associated with the Fire Type, when in balance, is joy and they create intimacy and connection easily. However when out of balance the Fire Type can get anxious and suffer from insomnia and palpitations. They're prone to overheating and can suffer acne and skin rashes. Because the heart is the organ most associated with the fire element, they are also prone to circulatory problems.

Advice for Fire Types

- Balance your sociable nature by taking time to be alone each day.
- Writing in a journal or meditating helps balance you when you feel frenetic.
- It's important that Fire Types guard against becoming too scattered and so try to plan ahead and prioritize what's important.
- Fire types respond well to regularity and that includes regular small meals.
- You should avoid foods that are too spicy and over-heating and include in your diet bitter foods, such as leafy greens and cooling foods such as pears, cucumber and yogurt.
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The Earth Type

Think of a vegetable garden and you'll have some idea of who the Earth Type is. They are **nurturing, grounded and practical** people who enjoy nourishing others and are known for their reliability. Earth Types are drawn to harmony and like to feel connected to other people. They are **compassionate and empathetic** and often go into **caring professions** or use their skills to arbitrate disputes or negotiate agreements.

The season of the Earth Type is late summer with its harvest and bounty and they are often enthusiastic gardeners who love to grow their own food. They also enjoy home crafts such as

cooking, knitting or quilting. Likewise they may express their love of nature by being environmentalists or working in conservation.

Earth people often have square faces with strong jaws and sallow complexions. Their features can be large, especially the mouth. Their bodies are often thick set or curvy.

Earth types are thoughtful but when out of balance these thoughts can become **obsessive and intrusive** and can **cause them to worry unnecessarily**. Also their wish to be needed sometimes leads Earth Types into co-dependent relationships or makes them give too much and become depleted. The organs associated with the Earth Element are the digestive organs so if they get run down they may have digestive problems, loose stools, fatigue and food allergies. They can also crave carbohydrates and put on weight easily.

Advice for Earth Types

- Work on developing good boundaries and being able to say “no”.
- Make time to be in nature because this will refuel you.
- Earth Types should work at staying present and not allowing their mind to stray into the future and worry too much about things that may ever happen.
- Avoid sweets and replace them with sweet vegetables such as yams or carrots.

The Metal Type

When I think of Metal Types I imagine a knight with a shiny sword. Metal Types are **righteous, faithful, brave and gallant**. They're **intellectually sharp** and this, combined with their tendency for self-discipline, can make them very successful. They like structure and tend to be **organized and methodical**.

Perfectionists in everything they do, Metal Types are highly creative and detail orientated. With their ability to “cut to the chase”, Metal Types are good at solving problems and make good lawyers, teachers or counselors. Metal types have strong muscular bodies and broad shoulders and tend to have oval faces with widely set cheekbones and pale complexions. They often have straight hair. They are known for their fast metabolism and rarely have problems with their weight.

The Metal Element is associated with the lungs and skin and so when out of balance Metal Types are prone to respiratory problems such as asthma and skin problems such as eczema and psoriasis.

The season of the Metal Element is the Fall and the emotion associated with this type is grief. The Fall is when we all start to slow down after the excitement of summer and Metal Types can seem insular, preferring a small group of close friends as opposed to being part of a large crowd. When out of balance the Metal Type can allow grief and past hurts to damage their present relationships. This can make it hard for them to form bonds with other people and they may end up replacing intimacy with material things.

Advice for Metal Types.

- Regular aerobic exercise will strengthen your lungs and benefit the Metal Type.
- Seeking help with letting go of the past can really support the Metal Type to form good relationships.
- Watch for a tendency to self-righteousness which is one of the ways the Metal Type protects herself from pain.
- Breathing deeply is important for Metal Types so a meditative technique that involves focusing on the breath can be helpful.
- Metal Types should avoid junk food and opt for foods high in minerals especially leafy greens vegetables.
- White foods such as mushrooms are also particularly nourishing for the Metal Element.

The Water Type

Think of a river carving its course through a valley and you'll understand the Water Element. Water Types are able to go with the flow but they also have a strong will and get things done. They are known for their determination and are often described as self-contained or self-sufficient. Unlike the Wood Types, who get things done by force, the Water Types are more adaptable and achieve their aims by determining the best path through a situation.

Water Types enjoy anonymity and are often introspective making them somewhat enigmatic. As the old adage goes, "still waters run deep" and these people may seem to be wise beyond their years or quietly philosophical. The season of the Water Element is winter when quietness and stillness reign and the Water Types reflect this by seeking out solitude and tranquility.

Water types often have round faces and soft rounded bodies. They have large soft eyes and often have dark hair. If they are out of balance they are prone to dark rings under the eyes.

The organs associated with the Water type are the Kidney and Bladder and if they are prone to urinary tract infections and water metabolism issues leading to swelling and edema. The Water element also governs the bones so Water Types can have sore joints and back problems. The emotion associated with water is fear and when out of balance the water type can be fearful, timid and indecisive.

Advice for Metal Types.

- Guard against becoming too isolated by consciously prioritizing your social life.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Be aware that fear is a sign that you have become imbalanced and take steps to overcome timidity.
- Soups and stews support the Water Element and are particularly important in winter when the Water Type should avoid cold foods and salads.
- Seaweed is particularly nourishing for the Water Type and should be included in the diet wherever possible.