



# CUPPING THERAPY

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**A**cupuncture and acupressure are more popular as an alternate therapies but this Chinese science is very deep and it also had many branches of different therapies. Acupressure science not only include massage the points but therapies like Cupping, Moxibustion, Gau Sha, Chinese herbs, Tunia massage etc. I am writing for Cupping Therapy and Moxibustion Therapy.

People got curious about cupping therapy after seeing the red round marks on Olympic athletes like Michael Phelps during the summer Olympics.

Cupping is essentially a form of body work or therapy that uses suction from the cups to achieve the desired results. This may stimulate blood flow, relieve pain, and provide many other health-promoting effects.

However, before going out and trying cupping therapy for yourself, it is a good idea to understand what it is, what it's used for, and the potential pitfalls.

**What Is Cupping Therapy?**  
Cupping therapy involves placing a plastic cup on the skin and pumping air out of the space inside the cup. This creates suction that breaks capillaries, the small blood vessels near the skin surface, and results in red (or purple) marks where the cup was. These were the circles seen on many athletes in the Olympics.

There are two types of cupping therapy: wet and dry. Dry therapy uses the action of the suction cup alone. Wet cupping (more commonly practiced in Persian medicine, called Hijama), involves bloodletting inside the suction cup.

Dry cupping can be done two ways:

In a single area (also called static cupping)

By moving the cup around to several places (more like a massage but with suction instead of pressure)

## Origins of Cupping Therapy

Historical records document cupping use in Chinese medicine over 3,000 years ago. Other records indicate that the ancient Egyptians and Greeks practiced it as well. Hippocrates, known as the father of medicine, even used it. Nowadays, cupping is practiced as part of traditional Oriental (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) and Persian medicine.

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Interestingly, the Chinese and the Egyptians both discovered cupping independently thousands of years ago. When the same healing tool is found in opposite parts of the world (before there was the internet, mind you) and the tool is still practiced thousands of years later, it is a testament to its benefits.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) historically placed cups on specific acupuncture points to stimulate the points. For example, someone with allergies and colds would be thought to have a stagnation of the lungs. In that case, a cup is placed on an acupuncture point for the lungs, and will often turn into the darkest color of bruises even though all the cups are placed on the skin with the same negative pressure. TCM practitioners consider that cupping works better the darker color the mark is, because the darker color means more stagnation is released.

Before there were plastic suction cups, practitioners used glass cups and flame (fire cupping). Burning a piece of cotton inside the cup removed oxygen from the air, causing negative air pressure. When the practitioner immediately put the cup on the skin, the skin underneath the cup would be sucked into the cup.

## Modern Use of Cupping

While cupping is used in TCM for overall health, conventional physiotherapists use it too. Modern biomedical literature lists cupping as a pain-relief tool or as a tool for myofascial release. Many massage techniques involve manipulating blood to flow into the muscles to release trigger points and flush out inflammation. Similarly, cupping therapy can do the same thing for areas of the body with less fat tissue, such as the back and shoulders.

In a review article in the Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapy, Rozenfeld and Kalichman (both academic physiotherapists) described the physiological effects of cupping:

Mechanically, cupping increases blood circulation, whereas physiologically it activates the immune system and stimulates the mechanosensitive fibers, thus leading to reduction in pain.

Sometimes a musculoskeletal issue that is stagnant in its healing process can be stimulated into healing by slightly irritating the tissue or initiating some inflammation. This concept applies to prolotherapy, where a foreign substance (usually dextrose) is injected into an injured joint to stimulate inflammation. Similarly, because cupping creates localized inflammation, it can have this effect on a stagnant injury in addition to stimulating more blood and lymph flow to that area.

## Does Cupping Therapy Really Work?

Many people, including celebrities and athletes, attest to the benefits of cupping therapy. Mechanistically, it makes sense

that cupping therapy can reduce pain and support healing.

In real life, a clinician- be it a doctor, physiotherapist, or TCM practitioner- should be able to help identify causes health issues and treat with an individualized approach. Personal experience and a clinician's expertise should help decide whether cupping therapy is right for you.

### Managing the Risks of Cupping Therapy

Cupping is considered a relatively safe procedure and cupping cups are available without prescription. This means anyone can purchase them and do cupping on anyone. However, complications such as injury and infections can happen, so it is important to get cupping therapy from a qualified practitioner.

Risks of injuries from cupping include:

- Muscle sprains or deep bruises from very heavy suction
- Burns from fire cupping (only get fire cupping from well trained practitioner)
- Infections from dirty cups

In order to safely and effectively enjoy cupping therapy, be sure to:

Receive cupping therapy from a qualified practitioner such as a TCM practitioner or acupuncturist. If you are receiving cupping therapy for myofascial work, consult your physiotherapist, massage therapist, or chiropractor for the best way to go about it and specific contraindications that you should be aware of.

Pay attention to the pain levels and communicate with your practitioner as you are receiving cupping so they can remove the cups or adjust the pressure. It can feel uncomfortable to have suction cups on your skin, but the pain should not exceed a 2 out of 10.

Only receive cupping therapy from hygienic clinics that sterilize their tools, and clean their cups between patients.

Avoid cupping around areas with small, sensitive muscles and nerves. This includes the neck and jaws.

Don't try cupping near open wounds and fresh injuries.

Avoid cupping if you are on a blood thinning medication or have a bleeding disorder.

Avoiding leaving cups on for more than 15 minutes as the risks may exceed the benefits by this point.

Always check with your primary doctor and any other necessary health professionals before beginning any type of therapy, including cupping.

Have you tried cupping therapy? What was your experience? Please weigh in.

The benefits of cupping therapy- and does it actually work

#### Ms. Shobhana Punjabi.

Age 27 years

I used to get severe lower back pain right before I got my period. It was so bad my chiropractor was amazed at the state of the muscles in my back. I was terrified of cupping, but I let my Doctor of Chinese Medicine do dry cupping on me for the first time (He was very gentle with the amount of suction used). Afterwards I couldn't believe how amazingly good I felt. I wasn't at all expecting it to really bring relief (I'm pretty skeptical - no placebo effect here). Ever since then I haven't had back pain that bad.

#### Mrs. Nandita Dalal

Age 51 years

I use a small cupping device on my face. I am amazed how beautiful my face looks. It has amped up my glow 100 fold! Go to Beautiful on the Raw and try it. They have one specifically designed for the face. You will not regret it. I promise. I glow!

#### Mr. Anil Gupta

Age 56 years.

I get massages once a month as I have fibromyalgia. My massage therapist uses the cupping on my back and shoulders and it helps tremendously. The results last much longer than just a regular massage.

#### Mr. Ravi Mohan

Age 39 years

I Had a serious back injury about 13 years ago. I opted to forgo surgery and get treatment other ways. One of those ways was cupping. I saw a Chinese massage therapist 3 times a week and this was one of the treatments he used. Treatment took a long time, but i saw medical doctors along the way and they were skeptical, but it was obvious that i made improvements to the point where they said that surgery would no longer be effective for me. Now, I remain cautious with certain activities, but I'm pain free and have been for 10 years.

### MOXA Treatment



For ancient doctors, the guiding principle was balance.

Naturally, a patient who is cold and weak needs warmth and strength. In traditional Chinese medicine, the main remedy for this affliction is called moxibustion or moxa.

Moxa gives deep, penetrating heat to resolve underlying cold.

The cold will settle in the uterus or the lower abdomen or the GI tract. Often time you can feel when you palpate areas where they're cold where they shouldn't be Moxa is an easy way to bring heat to the area.

The name "moxa" is an anglicized version of the Japanese word "mogusa," which means "burning herbs." The practice involves burning medicinal cigars and cones on or near the body.

Moxa is said to have originated from northern China at least 3,000 years ago, and burned on acupuncture points long before the advent of needles. Today moxa is used to treat a wide range of issues, such as chronic digestive disturbance, menstrual problems, reproductive concerns, and advanced illnesses such as tuberculosis, Lyme disease, and cancer.

Its very powerful for pain. Many patients we see come in with a lot of pain and sometimes the needles alone aren't enough.

It is unique in that many Western practitioners of Chinese medicine have shied away from moxa, preferring instead to focus attention on acupuncture.

In China, Japan, and Korea, moxa plays a major role in treatment, but in the United States the technique has been slow to catch on. Moxa is taught in Chinese medicine schools, but many American acupuncturists abandon this modality once they graduate.

Accordingly, the biggest issue with moxa is the smell. Moxibustion treatment creates an aromatic smoke which many people mistake for marijuana.

"People are like, 'oh, what is that smell? Is that okay? Is it supposed to smell like that?'" they said. "The bottom line is that it's a very effective technique."

Small moxa cones are placed on acupuncture points along the spine and burned for warmth and strength.

### Primary Medicine

Moxa has not been researched as much as acupuncture, but the available literature shows positive effects on the blood, immunity, and the regeneration of tissue. A 1998 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that 75 percent of pregnant women had their breech fetuses turn to the normal position with moxa burned on an acupuncture point located on the pinky toe.

While moxa may be considered a minor part of Chinese medicine in the West, ancient doctors held it in high regard. In the Nei Jing-a fundamental text in Chinese medicine-moxa is said to "do what the needle cannot."

What keeps many American acupuncturists from using moxa is that they're too worried about the possibility of accidentally burning a patient. He urges practitioners to overcome this fear with practice.

### Magical Mugwort

Moxa is made from a prolific weed called mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), which is often prescribed in herbal medicine for uterine complaints, such as labor pain, menstrual cramps, and heavy bleeding, as well as digestive, hormonal, and circulatory disorders.

For use in moxibustion, mugwort is processed into a spongy material called moxa wool.

A moxa burner is filled with burning moxa wool, and held about an inch over the body.

Mugwort smoke has a calming effect on the nervous system. Once patients get over the funny smell, they may actually enjoy it.

Some patients drift off into a nice euphoric rest during their treatment,

Moxa can benefit anyone, but there are times when it is not appropriate, such as with fever, infection, eczema, and other signs of excess heat. Points on the abdomen and lower back should be avoided in the early stages of pregnancy.

### Direct and Indirect

Moxa techniques are divided into two categories: direct and indirect. The direct method, which requires a skilled practitioner, burns directly on the skin. With the indirect method, a hot moxa ember is held about an inch away from the body.

The indirect method is easy to learn, and often times a practitioner may give the patient a moxa cigar and an acupuncture point to hold it over to continue treatment at home.

Hold the heat above the prescribed point, and pull it away when it gets too hot. Give the area a few seconds to cool, then resume treatment.

One popular form is a charcoal-based smokeless moxa stick for those who want to avoid the smoke and smell. However, these are less effective.

I try never to use smokeless, unless for some reason that's the only thing available.

For people with asthma, allergies, or suspicious neighbors, Silver recommends high grade Japanese moxa, such as Ibuki Gold Mountain.

It has very, very little smell, Most of the smell you get from this kind of moxa is from the incense you use to light it. Many people can tolerate it."

From desk of: Dr. Ambarish Mathuria.  
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