

Cupping Massage

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Cupping Definition

Cupping therapy is based on the Traditional Chinese Medical (TCM) method of encouraging healing by creating negative pressure via suction. The main purpose is to enhance the circulation of blood and chi or qi.

History

Cupping traces its documented history from TCM dating over 3,000 years ago (though multiple sources affirm that indigenous medicine people/shamans used versions of suction that predate TCM). In addition to Tui Na, Gua sha, acupuncture/acupressure, and herbs, cupping helps comprise the basic TCM approaches to bodywork. Other cultures utilizing cupping include ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, as supported by archeological texts (both Hippocrates and Galen were proponents of cupping therapy). From the ancient Greeks and Romans, cupping was then passed on to Arabs and Persians and even the prophet Mohammad sanctioned the use of cupping. In western cultures, cupping remained an integral part of conventional, alternative, and folk-based medicine until the early 20th century. An early pioneer of western surgery, Charles Kennedy wrote in 1826, "The art of cupping has been so well-known, and the benefits arising from it so long experienced, that it is quite unnecessary to bring forward testimonials in favor of what has received not only the approbation of modern times, but also the sanction of remotest antiquity." Interestingly, although cupping fell out of favor in the early 1900s, recent inventions like the modern breast pump evolved from the use of cups for lactation difficulties. The good news is cupping is enjoying a well-deserved resurgence of popularity and likely will continue to for much time to come.

Eastern & Western Theories of Cupping Efficacy

"In every culture and in every medical tradition before ours, healing was accomplished by moving energy." — Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, Biochemist and Nobel Prize Winner

TCM asserts that the skin is like a fence, and has the ability to breathe, defend, excrete, and regulate body temperature. This fence or force field is known as "wei chi" in TCM and is responsible for encouraging our overall wellness and prevention from

infection and disease. In conjunction with the wei chi, our meridians assist in health by clearing and removing “stagnation” out of our body.

The meridians are the energetic channels that connect the inside of our body (organs, glands, blood, nerves, etc.) with the outside of our body where the acupoints live. Ideally, meridians regulate, balance, and harmonize our body’s Yin Yang forces and are the networks that transport nutrients and energy to our organs. We will be healthy if stagnation from the meridians are removed.

Stagnation may be viewed through a physical lens—such as poor circulation, lymphatic congestion, digestive sluggishness, edema, excess mucus, areas of ischemia, etc. And, stagnation may also be viewed via an energetic perspective: procrastination, rumination, fatigue, depression, etc. Cupping therapy focuses on clearing the following four common categories of stagnation. Blood stagnation includes injuries, adhesions, and menstrual irregularities. Stagnant toxins refers to gastrointestinal disorders, rigid muscles, and breast inflammation. Qi stagnation includes muscular pain, dysmenorrhea, and pinched nerves. And fluid stagnation relates to conditions like lung congestion, asthmas, and lactation dysfunction.

Through cupping on the skin, blood seeps out from the capillaries under the skin and forms discoloration or marks called “sha”. Sha is the toxin and/or metabolic waste that accumulate due to stagnation. The darker the color of the sha, the more stagnation and therefore greater imbalance there is. The sha often presents in a circular shaped skin blemish similar to coloration of a bruise, but this is not in fact what is clinically occurring. A bruise is defined as a “contusion or dark painful area on the skin, where blood has escaped under the skin following a blow”. However, the circular cupping outline is not the result of positive pressure, as in a blow or sudden impact. Rather these areas of sha are the result of negative pressure, which is clinically known as “ecchymosis”.

Ecchymosis is a local leakage of blood into the skin from the capillaries through pulling (as opposed to pushing/pressure) and is painless. The ecchymosis will generally disappear within 3-5 days, though in rare cases of extremely pervasive stagnation, discoloration may last up to two weeks. When practicing cupping therapy, if there’s no pain, there’s no stagnation. And if there’s no stagnation, no pain will present with the treatment.

For those interested in some of the finer points of TCM, it’s important to see the inherent and profound relationship between blood and qi. A common axiom shared among TCM physicians assets: “The blood carries the qi. And the qi moves the blood.” This can be symbolized by imagining a skateboard and its rider as the blood and qi respectively. In this analogy, the blood carries the qi, like the skateboard carries the rider. And the qi moves the blood, as the rider propels the skateboard.” At its simplest, cupping removes sha or stagnation resulting in blood and therefore qi purification.

An excerpt from Zihni Chirali’s book, TCM Cupping Therapy summarizes the idea of blood purification as follows: “Among the general effects, the most important is

the [cupping] effect on the circulatory system. Professor Kentaro Takagi of Nagoya University says that the skin stimulating therapies are significant in that they awaken the greatest responses in the circulatory system. Owing to the pull of low pressure, the flow of blood in the arteries and veins increases, although in the case of the latter, localized spots of congested blood appear and then disappear. It is possible to ease the interruption of blood circulation and congestion and to stop the inflammatory extravasation (escaping bodily fluids such as blood) from the tissues. **Therefore, facilitation of the flow of blood is the most important characteristic of this therapy.** It is very beneficial for hardened arteries, stiff shoulders, etc." Taking this one step further, Dr. Katase of Oaska University suggests that cupping may actually influence the composition of blood by increasing red and white blood cells and transforming acidic blood into a more healthy alkaline or neutral pH.

To summarize, cupping creates a vacuum suction and provides negative pressure, sometimes creating changes in skin coloration, or echymosis. This process invites blood to flow from as far as 4 inches deep to the skin lifting and drawing circulation from the arteries to the more superficial capillaries, fascial, and meridians. This enhanced circulation distributes greater levels of nutrition, oxygenation, qi flow into the surrounding areas, while simultaneously encouraging detoxification of cellular waste and excess fluid. The founder of Osteopathic Medicine, Andrew Taylor Stills, simply summates healing with this formula: "Circulation is all."

Cupping Benefits

- Stimulates body's defense system (TCM calls this "wei chi")
- Regulates meridian flow
- Improves oxygen supply
- Enhances immune system (lymphatic system)
- Skin warms with increased circulation
- Sedates the nervous system (which makes it an excellent treatment for HBP)
- Relieve back and neck pains,
- Stiff muscles
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Migraines
- Rheumatism
- Cellulite

Symptoms Indicated for Cupping

- Muscle spasms, sprains, and strains
- Fibromyalgia
- Migraines and Headaches
- Digestive discomfort
- Fluid retention (edema)
- Detoxing
- Poor circulation
- Cellulite
- Insomnia
- Stress
- Depression
- Decreased energy
- Adrenal fatigue
- Tissue and joint inflammation
- Tired sore and overworked muscles
- Arthritis
- Rheumatism
- Osteoporosis
- Carpel tunnel syndrome
- Back pain
- Sciatica
- Scar tissue
- Stretch marks
- Common cold
- Restless leg syndrome

Systemic Contraindications for Cupping

- Renal failure history
- Cirrhosis
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Clients who are fasting
- Those on blood thinners or have history of thrombosis
- Severe anemia
- Leukemia
- Pregnancy
- Blood disorders
- High fever

Localized Contraindications for Cupping

- Acute Inflammation
- Locations of Hernia/s
- Localized broken skin/open sores
- Dermatitis
- Varicose veins
- Also see joint replacement, broken bones, & surgeries below

Precautions for:

- Wait 9 months after joint replacement surgery on the effected area
- Wait 3 month's after all other surgeries and/or bone fractures on the effected areas
- Use less strenuous cupping for young and elderly clients, or those in ill health
- No skin exfoliation directly prior to cupping

Considerations:

- Cups will loose suction on hairy, loose, or wrinkly skin, and on boney areas
- If skinny, may not be able to slide, so consider using stationary cups instead
- Avoid excess strenuous activities following treatment
- Drink warm or hot water following treatments for maximized detoxification
- Keep the body warm following the treatments

Potential Negative Reactions

In rare instances, or for those who are in weak health, the following symptoms might occur during or following the cupping service. These might include feeling:

- excessively cold or hot after treatment
- dizzy or faint
- nauseous
- experiencing cold sweats or palpitations

If any of these occur, consider massaging the following points:

*Massage in a counterclockwise direction to help tonify the qi

- Bai Hu (GV 20) located at the superior most, center point on the skull
- Yun Chuen (K1) located on center plantar foot between the ball and arch of the foot
- Nei Guan (PC 6) located 2-3 inches proximal to the anterior wrist crease
- Zhu San Li (ST 36) located 2-3 inches below the inferio-lateral border of patella

Cupping Equipment Options

There are a multitude of materials for cupping. Everything from bamboo, to leeches, to glass jar with a cotton ball dabbed in alcohol and lite on fire may be used for cupping. In a pinch, you might use a small ceramic tea cup, or in more modern times,

cups may be made of plastic or silicone materials, and may have a needle or suction pump and tube attached. For the simplicity of cupping massage, we recommend using pliable silicone cups with a non-drying massage oil to allow for glide.

Approaches to Cupping Massage

The main variables that have the most impact on the results of our cupping depend on how light or deep we create the suction, and whether we utilize movement or pause to rest the cups on specific areas. With silicone cups, the greater the size of the cup or the bigger the squeeze in the cut, the greater the suction and more intense the sensation will be. Moving or pausing with the cups also yield different results.

Sliding Cupping- After applying the cups to the skin, we begin to immediately move the cups in specific directions. This approach enhances the negative pressure effect to generate circulation of blood, lymph and chi, and is very versatile for any massage therapy session.

Stationary Cupping- After applying the cups to the skin, they are kept in place on specific locations for a period of time (generally 5-10minutes). This approach may result in circulatory coloration of the skin or “ecchymosis” (also clinical expressions are (aka “petechiae” and “purpura”), which may be confused with bruising, but does not induce bruise-like pain. Consider stationary cupping on relevant acupuncture points or areas of adhesion or ischemia only if the client is okay with the appearance of bruising.

Preparations

- Explain to your client what you’re doing and determine if they are concerned about the appearance of circular or other shaped discoloration (aka Petechiae, Purpura, or Ecchymosis)
- Be sure the skin is clean, dry, and free from long hair (interferes with suction)
- Consider warming the cups so they are close to body temperature (on hot cabi)
- Oil generally provides best suction, but if hairy, consider using a cream
- Squeeze the side or center of the cup to create the desired suction
- Begin with smaller cups and less suction, and progress with client’s feedback
- If you have difficulty moving the cups, consider adding more oil, lifting rather than pressing the cup, or squeeze the cup as you move it
- To disengage, consider leaning and then using a finger to levering off the skin
- Try to create soft hands and make as much contact with your hands on the skin as you move the cups
- Move slowly so client has an opportunity to feel the negative pressure

Cupping Massage Techniques for Back

Using 1 Large sized cup

Sedating Flow: Lunging stance on either side of table facing foot. Slide cup down the center of the spine and then up one side of erectors; repeat sliding down the center of the spine and then up the opposite erector. You may need to pivot your body mechanics when changing directions to be sure your belly always faces the direction you're moving. Repeat series 3x each side

*Indicated for acute conditions, painful projects, feeling hot, inflammatory projects (arthritis, HBP), insomnia, overactive, headaches

Tonifying Flow: Lunging stance on either side of table facing head. Slide cup up the center of the spine and then down one side of erectors; repeat sliding up the center of the spine and then down the opposite erector. You may need to pivot your body mechanics when changing directions to be sure your belly always faces the direction you're moving. Repeat series 3x each side

*Indicated for low energy, high fatigue, getting over colds, sadness, depression, chronic conditions

Using 2 Medium sized cups

Wing the Back - Use both cups to travel slowly down both erectors from the neck to the low back moving the cups incrementally from the spine out and back again (lateral to medial) in about 5 horizontal lines up and down. Repeat 3x

*Indicated for asymmetrical projects and/or with the intention of balancing extremes (for example, flipflopping between too much or too little energy, activity, etc)

Stationary Cups: Place stationary cup on lateral scapula, rhomboid, trapezius, low back, hip, or focus on any areas of Sha, tension or chief complaint.

*Also, feel free to leave stationary cups on any problem areas at the same time offering relaxation techniques on other areas of body.

Place stationary cups on following bilateral points:

-**Metal/Lung Points**- on rhomboids in line with superior angle of spine of scapula

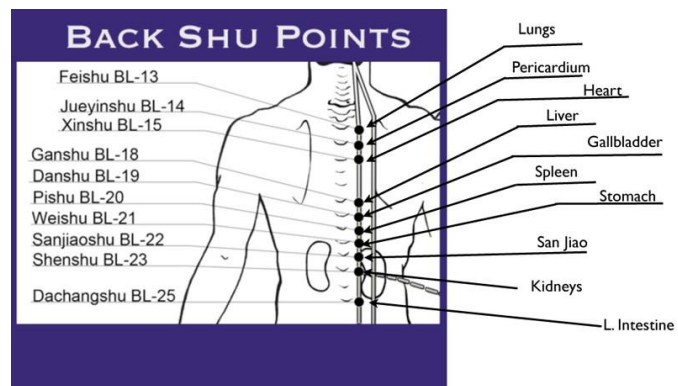
-**Fire/Heart Points**- on rhomboids in line with inferior angle of scapula

-**Wood/Liver Points**- on erectors just below heart points below scapula

-**Earth/Spleen Points**- on erectors at the waist line on or near floating ribs

-**Water/Kidney Points**- on erectors above iliac crest

Stationary Cups to Balance 5 Elements (& the 5 Corresponding Yin meridians)



Leave on for 10-15 minutes
(Be aware that Ecchymosis may result)

*Thank you for sharing your presence!
You help our dreams come true!!*

With loving kindness, Heath and Nicole Reed



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