

Chinese Cupping Therapy

What is a Chinese Cupping Massage and what are the benefits?

Traditional Chinese medicine brings to mind acupuncture and the use of natural herbs as healing remedies. Cupping is a lesser-known treatment that is also part of Oriental medicine, one that can provide an especially pleasant experience. One of the earliest documentations of cupping can be found in the work titled A Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies, which was written by a Taoist herbalist by the name of Ge Hong and which dates all the way back to 300 AD.

Cupping is the term applied to a technique that uses small glass cups or bamboo jars as suction devices that are placed on the skin. There are several ways that a practitioner can create the suction in the cups. One method involves swabbing rubbing alcohol onto the bottom of the cup, then lighting it and putting the cup immediately against the skin. Suction can also be created by placing an inverted cup over a small flame, or by using an

alcohol-soaked cotton pad over an insulating material (like leather) to protect the skin, then lighting the pad and placing an empty cup over the flame to extinguish it. Flames are never used near the skin and are not lit throughout the process of cupping, but rather are a means to create the heat that causes the suction within the small cups. A more modern version of cupping uses a rubber pump to create the vacuum inside the cup. Sometimes practitioners use medical-grade silicone cups. These are pliable enough to be moved from place to place on the skin and produce a massage-like effect.

Once the suction has occurred, the glass cups can be gently moved across the skin (often referred to as "gliding cupping"). The suction in the cups causes the skin and superficial muscle layer to be lightly drawn into the cup. Cupping is much like the inverse of massage - rather than

Cupping therapy is a form of alternative medicine in which cups are placed on the skin to create suction. Supporters of cupping therapy believe the suction of the cups mobilizes blood flow to promote the healing of a broad range of medical ailments.

Benefits of Cupping Therapy

The British Cupping Society says cupping therapy can treat a variety of conditions. This has not been backed up by studies. But the organization says cupping therapy is used to treat:

- ❖ Blood disorders such as anemia and hemophilia.
- ❖ Rheumatic diseases such as arthritis and fibromyalgia.
- ❖ Fertility and gynecological disorders.
- ❖ Skin problems such as eczema and acne.
- ❖ High blood pressure (hypertension).
- ❖ Migraine.
- ❖ Anxiety and depression.
- ❖ Bronchial congestion caused by allergies and asthma.
- ❖ Varicose veins.

Supporters also believe that cupping therapy can reduce pain and inflammation throughout the body. And they say it can promote mental and physical relaxation and well-being.

applying pressure to muscles, it uses gentle pressure to pull them upward. For most patients, this is a particularly relaxing and relieving sensation. Once suctioned, the cups are generally left in place for about ten minutes while the patient relaxes. This is similar to the practice of Tui Na, a traditional Chinese medicine massage technique that targets acupuncture points as well as painful body parts, and is well known to provide relief through pressure.

Generally, cupping is combined with acupuncture in one treatment, but it can also be used alone. The suction and negative pressure provided by cupping can loosen muscles, encourage blood flow, and sedate the nervous system (which makes it an excellent treatment for high blood pressure). Cupping is used to relieve back and neck pains, stiff muscles, anxiety, fatigue, migraines,

rheumatism, and even cellulite. For weight loss and cellulite treatments, oil is first applied to the skin, and then the cups are moved up and down the surrounding area.

Like acupuncture, cupping

through all tissues and organs, thus providing a smoother and more free-flowing qi (life force). Cupping is one of the best deep-tissue therapies available. It is thought to affect tissues up to four inches deep from the

external skin. Toxins can be released, blockages can be cleared, and veins and arteries can be refreshed within these four inches of affected materials. Even hands, wrists, legs, and ankles can be 'cupped,' thus applying the healing to specific organs that correlate with these points.

This treatment is also valuable for the lungs, and can clear congestion from a common cold or help to control a person's asthma. In fact, respiratory conditions are one of the most common maladies that cupping is used to relieve. Three thousand years ago, in the earliest Chinese documentation of cupping, it was recommended for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis.

Side Effects of Cupping Therapy

Cupping is considered to be relatively safe, especially when performed by trained health professionals. Potential side effects include:

- ❖ Mild discomfort
- ❖ Burns
- ❖ Bruises
- ❖ Skin infection

According to the British Cupping Society, cupping therapy should be avoided by the following groups:

- ❖ Pregnant or menstruating women.
- ❖ People with metastatic cancer (cancer that has spread from one part of the body to another).
- ❖ People with bone fractures or muscle spasms.

The organization also says cupping therapy should not be applied to sites on the body that have:

- ❖ A deep vein thrombosis
- ❖ An ulcer
- ❖ An artery
- ❖ A pulse that can be felt

Like many alternative treatments, cupping therapy has not been extensively studied. Researchers say that most cupping therapy studies have been small and poorly designed. More studies are needed to prove or disprove claims of health benefits.

follows the lines of the meridians. There are five meridian lines on the back, and these are where the cups are usually placed. Using these points, cupping can help to align and relax qi, as well as target more specific maladies. By targeting the meridian channels, cupping strives to 'open' these channels - the paths through which life energy flows freely throughout the body,