

## Cupping

Cupping is a technique that has been practiced throughout most of the world. It is mentioned in Greek writings dating from the fourth century BC, where the hard rind of a gourd was used. It has been practiced by Native Americans who used a buffalo horn, twelfth century Persians; sixteenth century Egyptians used horn and sheepskin. In England, cupping evolved over several centuries. Beginning with the sixteenth and moving through to the twenty-first centuries they started out using bronze moving to brass and pewter and finally to specially shaped glass.

Cupping is a technique also used in Chinese medicine. In Chinese medicine cupping was originally done with horns but it is now most commonly done with bamboo jars which have been cut and smoothed or glass cups. Cups come in a variety of sizes so that the most appropriate sized cup can be chosen for the size of the area being worked on. Cupping reduces swelling and pain while promoting the free flow of qi and blood. It is indicated for pains found in the low back, shoulders or legs, problems of the gastrointestinal system encompassing stomachache, diarrhea, or vomiting and lung diseases such as cough and asthma. It is often used to treat when wind dampness induces bi syndrome. When blood stasis is present cupping is combined with a bleeding technique, this method is known as wet cupping.

Cupping is most often done by using fire within the cup to burn off oxygen which creates a negative pressure allowing the cup to adhere to the skin and suction blood to the surface like a giant hicky. In England the cups were immersed in hot water and an item such as cotton or linen was lit and placed into the cups, these cups were then flipped over and onto the patient's skin where the fire would be extinguished do to lack of oxygen to keep it burning. There carried a

high risk of burns to the patient with this procedure. In comparison one method used in Chinese medicine is the fire throwing method, in which a piece of paper is lit on fire and dropped into the cup. The cup is then placed on the patient, but only in a lateral position so that the fire does not make contact with the skin at any point. The other method used is called fire twinkling. In this process the piece of lit paper or cotton is held in the cup for a few seconds and then removed before placing the cup on the individual. Other methods include suctioning of air. Native Americans would suck air out of a hole that had been bored into the horn being used then plug the hole. Similar modern methods include a pump and valve system to suction the air out and create the negative pressure needed.

The cup is left on the skin in place for 10-20 minutes, but can be slid across the area if lubrication has been applied first. The area where the cup sits will become anywhere from a dark pink to a deep purple. Bruising can occur in the area and will last anywhere from minutes to several days. The cupping should be done only in a muscular area, being careful to watch out for body hair and boney areas. With pregnant clients, one would avoid cupping in the abdominal and sacral regions. Local contraindications for all patients would include ulcers, edema and large blood vessels, while high fever and convulsions would be absolute contraindications.

<http://www.pjonline.com/Editorial/20040717/articles/p88cupping.html>. The Pharmaceutical Journal. Vol 273 no. 7308 pg 88. July 17, 2004. History repeating: the resurgence of cupping as a therapeutic medicine.

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