

The Benefits of Chinese Cupping Therapy.

Ask most people and you will hear that Traditional Chinese medicine is Acupuncture. In reality Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is so much more and it utilizes Moxabastion (burning Moxa- *Artemesia vulgaris*) over acupuncture points and channels. Gua Sha or sometimes referred to as scraping technique. Gua Sha is focused on bringing impurities/toxins to the surface and creating more blood and qi movement. One of the better known modalities associated with TCM is of course Chinese Medical Herbs. Cupping is a much lesser-known treatment that is also part of traditional medical treatment in an Acupuncture clinic. Many of my patients use it to help with pain, tightness or to simply induce a deeper relaxation for a greater sense of wellbeing.

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 a technique that uses glass cups (traditional fire cupping), or plastic air suction, or silicone, or vacuum to create vacuum suction. After vacuum is created the cup is placed on the skin. In the fire cupping method a practitioner quickly inserts a rubbing alcohol soaked cotton ball onto the cup, then lights it, withdraws the cotton ball quickly out of the cup and puts the cup immediately against the skin. Flames are never used to close to the skin and is extinguished quickly. Once the suction has occurred, the cups can be gently moved across the skin (referred to as moving cupping) or left stationary for the duration of the treatment. 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 applying pressure to muscles, it uses gentle pressure to pull them upward. Many patients experience the kind of benefit that is seen with deep tissue massage with less pressure and pain. They find this particularly relaxing and relieving experience. Once cups are in place feel secure, they will be left in place for about five to twenty minutes while the patient relaxes. Cupping technique targets acupuncture points, meridians (channels in the body), as well as, painful joints and muscles.

It is common to combine cupping with acupuncture in the same treatment. Cupping can be very effective just by itself. Over the years I have had patients requesting a cupping treatment only. Cupping therapy maybe a great alternative for someone who wishes to gain benefits from TCM, but the uncertainty of having Acupuncture done may prevent them from experiencing it. The suction and negative pressure provided by cupping can relax muscles, encourage blood and qi flow, and switch a patient from sympathetic to parasympathetic mode (fight or flight). Cupping is seen as an excellent treatment for high blood pressure and nervous system related issues. 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. During my training in a Chinese Integrative Hospital cupping was frequently done on the abdomen to stimulate metabolism and to create a deep sense of peace. In the cosmetic clinic at the TCM hospital it was used routinely when working with weight loss patients.

In TCM theory the back is transversed by meridians that are pathways where qi travels, cupping is applied to open these pathways. In Chinese Medicine it is frequently said that blood follows qi so life energy can freely flow through the body. In TCM the muscle layer is a cutaneous channel in it self. Because cupping can affect deep into these channels the toxins can be released, blockages can be cleared, and veins and arteries can be strengthened within. Even hands, arms, wrists, legs, knees and ankles can be 'cupped,' thus applying the healing to specific organs that correlate with specific points. Some of my patients who are runners and dancers love the cupping applied to their IT bands, hips, hamstrings and gluteal muscles. They will frequently utilize the treatment as pre or post training or workout.

As a child my first introduction to the use of cups has been in cases of bronchitis, cough and pneumonia. In the lungs cupping has been known to clear congestion from a common cold or help to control a person's asthma. Cupping use for respiratory conditions are one of the most common uses of this therapy. As long as 3000 years ago cupping was recommended for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis.

Below you will see some of the most recent research done on the usefulness of cupping. This research is taken directly from abolished abstracts in PubMed.

[Moving cupping at Hechelu combined with rubbing method for depression of diabetes mellitus].

[He L](#), [Du P](#), [Shen Z](#), [Wang X](#).

Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To compare the efficacy between moving cupping at Hechelu combined with rubbing method and western medication for depression of diabetes mellitus (DM).

METHODS:

Two hundred and sixteen patients were randomly divided into an observation group and a control group, 108 cases in each group. Patients in the observation group were treated with moving cupping at Hechelu combined with rubbing method, once every other day; six treatments were considered as one course, and totally two courses were given with an interval of 4 days between courses. Patients in the control group were treated with oral administration of fluoxetine hydrochloride capsules, once a day for consecutive 4 weeks. The Hamilton depression scale (HAMD), self-rating depression scale (SDS) and TCM symptom score were measured before treatment, after the treatment and in follow-up visit one and a half months after treatment. The fasting blood glucose was tested before and after treatment. The glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1c) was tested in the follow-up visit.

RESULTS:

The total effective rate was 90.9% (90/99) in the observation group, which was superior to 73.7% (70/95) in the control group ($P < 0.05$). After the treatment, HAMD, SDS and TCM symptom scores were all reduced apparently in the observation group and the control group (all $P < 0.05$). After the treatment and the follow-up visit, the TCM symptom score in the observation group was lower than that in the control group ($P < 0.05$). The levels of HbA1c and GLU were stable in the observation group, and were decreased compared with those before treatment; but the difference between the two groups was not significant ($P > 0.05$).

CONCLUSION:

The Hechelu theory-based TCM treatment has better efficacy for depression of diabetes mellitus than fluoxetine hydrochloride capsule, which has less adverse effects.(from Pubmed)

[Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.](#) 2016;2016:7358918. doi: 10.1155/2016/7358918. Epub 2016 Mar 17.

The Effectiveness of Cupping Therapy on Relieving Chronic Neck and Shoulder Pain: A Randomized Controlled Trial.[Chi LM](#)¹, [Lin LM](#)², [Chen CL](#)³, [Wang SF](#)⁴, [Lai HL](#)⁵, [Peng TC](#)⁶.

[Author information](#)

The research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of cupping therapy (CT) in changes on skin surface temperature (SST) for relieving chronic neck and shoulder pain (NSP) among community residents. A single-blind experimental design constituted of sixty subjects with self-perceived NSP. The subjects were randomly allocated to two groups. The cupping group received CT at SI 15, GB 21, and LI 15 acupuncture points, and the control group received no intervention. Pain was assessed using the SST, visual analog scale (VAS), and blood pressure (BP). The main results were SST of GB 21 acupuncture point raised from 30.6°C to 32.7°C and from 30.7°C to 30.6°C in the control group. Neck pain intensity (NPI) severity scores were reduced from 9.7 to 3.6 in the cupping group and from 9.7 to 9.5 in the control group. The SST and NPI differences between the groups were statistically significant ($P < 0.001$). One treatment of CT is shown to increase SST. In conjunction with the physiological effect the subjective experience of NSP is reduced in intensity. Further studies are required to improve the understanding and potential long-term effects of CT.