



CUPPING THERAPY: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT The World Health Organization defined Cupping therapy as a therapeutic method involving the application of suction by creating a vacuum. Suction through specific cupped instruments has been used since prehistoric times for the treatment of disease. Cupping therapy belongs to traditional Chinese medicine and in Islamic medicine therapeutic cupping is called "Hijima". There are two primary methods of application - Dry cupping (suction is placed directly on the skin) and Wet cupping (the skin is cut to physically draw out any unwanted or stagnant substances, such as blood, poison, venom, pus). The primary mechanism of cupping therapy includes Negative pressure, Vasodilation, and Enhanced fluid exchange, which helps to reduce pain. To relieve pain and stiffness of the Sciatica, wet cupping methods are used by applying cups over the lower back and in the posterior aspect of the affected limb.

KEYWORDS : Cupping, History, Physiological Response, And Mode Of Action.

INTRODUCTION

Cupping has been used for thousands of years. Different cultures have used cups, along with the negative pressure created inside them in their unique way, primarily to remove, or "suction, unwanted materials from the body, whether to draw out sickness, pains, pathogenic substances, or evil spirits. Today, bodywork practitioners have steadily adopted cupping as a complementary and alternative therapy to treat everything from constipation to cellulite to back and shoulder pain.

Methods of Cupping: There are primarily two methods of cupping:

Dry Cupping: In dry cupping, cups are placed on the skin using suction, typically created by heat or a mechanical device. The cups are left in place for a few minutes to facilitate the movement of stagnant blood and promote circulation. This method is often used for musculoskeletal pain, inflammation, and relaxation.

Wet Cupping: Wet cupping involves creating a small incision on the skin before applying the cup. The suction draws out a small amount of blood along with other fluids like toxins or stagnant substances

History Of Cupping Therapy

Cupping therapy has a long history that spans across different cultures and civilizations. Here's an overview of the history of cupping:

Ancient Origins: Cupping therapy is believed to have originated thousands of years ago, with early records found in ancient Egyptian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern cultures. The Egyptians used cupping around 1500 BC to treat fever and other health issues. In China, cupping was documented in one of the oldest medical textbooks, the Ebers Papyrus, dating back to 1550 BC.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM): Cupping has been integral to TCM for over 2,000 years. It is based on the belief that the body's stagnation or imbalance of qi (vital energy) leads to illness. Cupping is used to stimulate circulation, remove toxins, and promote healing.

Middle Eastern and Islamic Medicine: In Islamic medicine, cupping therapy is known as "Hijama." The practice of Hijama is mentioned in traditional Islamic texts and has been used for treating various ailments. It gained prominence during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who recommended it as a remedy for many illnesses.

European and Western Adoption: Cupping spread to Europe and was practiced in ancient Greece and Rome. It continued to be used in various forms throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, its popularity waned in Western medicine during the 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of modern medical practices.

Revival and Modern Use: In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in cupping therapy worldwide. It gained attention during the 2004 Olympics when athletes, including Michael Phelps, were seen with cupping marks. This brought cupping into the spotlight and renewed interest in its potential benefits for sports recovery and pain relief.

Throughout its history, cupping therapy has evolved in terms of techniques and materials used for cups (originally made from animal horns or bamboo, and now often glass, plastic, or silicone). It remains a part of traditional medicine systems and is also explored for its potential therapeutic benefits in modern integrative medicine practices.

Physiological Responses¹

Each body system will have a different reaction to cupping (more on that in the next chapter), but there are also a few basic mechanisms that occur when cups are applied to the body the primary mechanisms include:

1. Negative pressure
2. Vasodilation
3. Enhanced fluid exchange

Keep these three physiological responses in mind as we progress toward a deeper understanding of why cupping is so effective.

Negative Pressure

Once applied, cups lift the tissue and begin to take effect with negative pressure. This pressure creates a pulling action, which allows for the separation of fused or adhered tissue.

The body strives for fluidity and suppleness inside and out to provide the best environment possible for optimal bodily functions. Any tissue that is "stuck" inhibits optimal functioning. Whether tissues are stuck as the result of dehydration, or chronic inflammation, repetitive motion injuries (when muscles can stick together from fascial binding) or any other cause, tissues that are adhered to are not in their ideal condition. This same pulling action can draw out any interstitial debris that may be trapped within the soft tissues.

The human anatomy has an impressive capacity to store material within the layers of tissue. The body primarily focuses on remaining intact, single unit contained within the outer protective layer of the skin. Connective tissues are meant to do exactly what their name implies: the body is connected; that is, ensure that everything is attached where it should be for optimal functioning. Anything that tries to interrupt this harmonious balance may become tangled in the fibres of various tissues as the body struggles to maintain its structural integrity around this unwanted material. Cupping can work to draw such materials out. A simple comparison is to what a household vacuum does for carpets - cups can do the same for the body.

Vasodilation

Vasodilation is the action of widening blood vessels and is usually activated by the relaxation of smooth muscle tissue in any given area. Cups stimulate a local response within the underlying tissue structures, promoting the release of vaso-activating chemicals, such as histamines, which in turn encourages the lumen of the blood vessels to dilate. A similar response is achieved by massage or applying either heat or prolonged cold applications. This vascular dilation allows for fluids to rush into or through the area.

Enhanced Fluid Exchange

Cupping has a powerful effect on blood, interstitial fluids (those that surround cells), and lymph. Cups act as a vacuum, drawing fluids into an area or encouraging them through their respective exchange processes. The capillaries host various fluid-exchanging processes (diffusion, filtration, osmosis, and active transport). These processes allow nutrient-rich fluids to feed cells while removing waste material at the same time. The vacuum effect of cupping pulls blood into

dehydrated, malnourished, or ischemic (deficient in blood) tissues. Due to their suction pump effect on the body, cups also encourage venous return and lymph fluid movements.

The combination of negative pressure, vasodilation, and enhanced fluid exchange allows for some incredible reactions to take place within the body. But before we go further, it is important to understand how the presence of adhesions and interstitial debris can adversely affect the human body.

Cups encourage circulation: One of the cupping's impressive benefits is how the therapy stimulates overall circulation, even down to the capillary level (microcirculation). Skin, muscles, and visceral organs all respond positively to the promotion of this delicate process.

Cups alleviate adhesions. Another extraordinary benefit offered delicate process. by cupping is how it addresses adhesions. The ability to lift and separate tissue while simultaneously offering hydration to that restricted is incredibly

Cups help clear congestion and stagnation. Anything stagnant in an otherwise healthy internal environment is what predominantly leads to dysfunction and disease. Cups help clear stagnation from skin, muscles, bones, joints, organs, and even energies (whether emotional energies that lead to physical manifestations or energies relating to vital life forces. like Traditional Chinese Medicine that uses cups to influence qi)-everything! For example, limited movement of a joint (such as a frozen shoulder) can be caused by a stagnation of inflammatory materials. This trapped heat (inflammation) can dehydrate the surrounding muscles, leading to a lack of flexibility, which ultimately progresses to a limited range of motion. Another example is cellulite. Challenged circulation in the hips and gluteal region can lead to a stagnation of lymph fluids, which cannot maneuver around the congested adipose tissue that is stuck between the micro-adhesions of connective tissue Cups enable optimal fluidity to return to the body.

Cups can lift, rehydrate, and manipulate fascia: Fascia is a form of connective tissue that envelops all muscle tissues, is interwoven throughout all structures of anatomy, and contributes to maintaining the structural integrity of the entire human body Fascial restrictions can be challenging to release in therapies like massage or physical rehabilitation, so working with cups can help facilitate some impressive results. Cupping forces hydration through these fluid-rich structures, which can improve pliability to what may have been otherwise dehydrated and therefore adhered structures. The negative pressure allows for a lifting and stretch in mechanism to occur, and this provides an opportunity to create space where it is lacking. All of this allows for a potentially substantial change in otherwise restricted or immobilized areas.

Cups can cause microtrauma in tissues: Although this response sounds counterproductive, cupping can bring about beneficial inflammation to encourage deep-seated restrictions to clear and rebuild healthy tissue, thus encouraging the body's process of regeneration. This is why it is so important to apply appropriate suction. An increase to a stronger suction is only recommended when the person's body is receptive to it - meaning no pain or discomfort is felt when cups are applied, rather than immediately applying suction that is potentially too strong and causing damage.

Cups encourage neovascularization: The neovascularization process by which new blood vessels form from already existing healthy vessels, bringing a fresh supply of nutrients and oxygen to previously deficient tissues. In areas of injury or damaged tissue (for example, excessive physical exertion leading to muscle tearing), cupping can stimulate this response in regional tissues, which in turn can speed recovery. Again, do not use cupping directly on severely injured tissue. Cups help alleviate excessive pressure on sensory organs in soft tissue, which leads to a reduction in pain. When soft tissue is restricted, it can cause the nerve endings that respond to pain to become overactive, stuck in a state of pain alert. The vasodilation response, along with the applied negative pressure, encourages these tight tissues to relax, thereby releasing the tension on the sensory organs involved.

Probable Mode of Action of Cupping Therapy²

The CUPPING THERAPY works on the principle of vacuum suction. In Cupping therapy, Negative pressure applied to the skin surface causes a local collection of filtered and interstitial fluids containing the

causative pathological substance at the skin uplifting inside cups. Scarifying skin uplifting followed by cupping causes a pressure gradient and a traction force across the skin and capillaries to excrete collected fluids with causative pathological substance and cause bleeding at puncture sites. This increases filtration at both capillary ends and causes clearance of blood and interstitial spaces from causative pathological substances. Cupping therapy benefits from the suction pressure, the phenomenon of reactive hyperaemia, nitric oxide production, and skin scarification (openings in skin barrier) in enhancing natural excretory skin functions, improving lymphatic and capillary circulations, and restoring homeostasis.

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