

HEALTH

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TCM

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Up for a cup?

Cupping is a traditional Chinese medicine method of treating disease caused by localised congestion. A partial vacuum is created in a cupping jar (often using heat), which is then applied to the skin.

The underlying tissue is drawn up into the jar, forming an area of blood stasis, which later looks like bruising.

In ancient times, animal horns and bamboo jars were used, principally to drain pustulating sores. Later, this method was used to treat consumptive

and rheumatic diseases. Today, jars are made mostly out of glass to standard sizes and specifications, although bamboo jars are still occasionally used.

Cupping is used for the treatment of arthritic pain, abdominal pain, stomach ache, indigestion, headache, hypertension, common cold, cough, low back pain, painful menstruation, and insect and poisonous-snake bite.

It is said by TCM practitioners that disease is due to stagnation or blocked *chi* and cupping will unblock and realign it, thereby restoring health.

It shouldn't be used when there's high fever, or to treat convulsions, cramps, allergic skin conditions or ulcerated sores. Cupping should

only be done on soft muscle tissue. It shouldn't be used where the muscle layer is thin or isn't level because of bony projections, or on the face, the abdomen or lower back of pregnant women.

The method is for a practitioner to attach a cotton ball to a stick or forceps and dip it into 90 per cent alcohol. The ball is then lit and thrust into the jar. This evacuates some of the air in the jar, creating a vacuum.

The cotton ball is quickly removed, so the jar itself isn't heated. Then the jar is thrust onto the skin, and muscle tissue will be sucked up into it. The jar is left in place for 15 to 20 minutes.

According to TCM, depending on the degree of toxicity in the muscle

tissue, treatment will result in either a light reddening of the skin for slight toxicity, or a nasty looking bruise if there's high toxicity.

A lubricant may be used for a better seal and to allow cups to be moved around more easily.

Cupping can also be

combined with acupuncture. The needle is inserted into the desired point and then a large jar is placed over it.

Another method is to use a pump to create the vacuum. Kits are available at most TCM suppliers. This method is preferred by some because there is no danger of accidental burning.

Although cupping is said to be effective for treating colds, flu and a variety of muscle strain injuries and for drawing out toxins, it leaves large areas of bruising and can be uncomfortable for the patient. The bruises aren't dangerous and disappear in a few days.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner