

Cupping, like acupuncture, is a treatment used in traditional Chinese medicine. First documented almost 3,000 years ago, cupping relies on suction and heat to promote healing. While the method often leaves temporary circular marks on the skin, it is known to be highly relaxing and isn't generally painful. Celebrities, such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Jennifer Aniston, and Victoria Beckham, have brought the therapy into the mainstream.

The technique utilizes bamboo jars or small glass cups that are heated and placed on the skin. No fire is actually used on the skin. Instead, the cups are sometimes brushed with rubbing alcohol and lit on fire or placed over a flame. The heat helps to cultivate the suction by eliminating oxygen and creating a vacuum. When the cups are placed on the necessary points on the body, the practitioner can glide the cups over the skin.

In addition to heated, or dry cupping, some traditional Chinese medicine practitioners rely on air and wet cupping. Air cupping is when a pump is used to create the vacuum. Wet cupping is when the skin is punctured and a tiny amount of blood is sucked into the cup.

The vacuum from the cup draws the skin up and into the glass. Depending on the condition, the cups may be left on the skin for up to 10 minutes. When the skin is sucked into the cup, the pores open, the muscles relax, blood flow improves, toxins are removed, qi is balanced, and blockages are broken up. Similar to acupuncture, cups are placed along the meridians, typically on the back, but also occasionally on the legs, stomach, and arms.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, cupping is thought to treat specific conditions as well. It is commonly used for respiratory issues, such as asthma and congestion. Cupping may also alleviate maladies including depression, swelling, gastrointestinal disorders, back and neck pain, fatigue, migraines, cellulite and more.

Cupping is not appropriate for everyone. Therefore it is essential to see a practitioner licensed in traditional Chinese medicine. The treatment may be used in conjunction with acupuncture or alone. To determine if cupping is right for you, visit a licensed acupuncturist in your area.



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The images included with this article are the work of Bob Wong at Art Of Acupuncture.

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