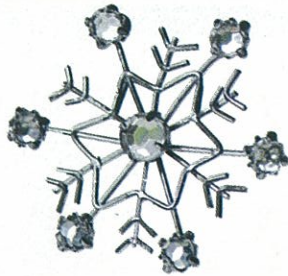


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# Fire Cupping

## an ancient practice

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Fire cupping refers to an ancient Chinese medical practice in which glass cups are applied directly to the skin. By holding a lit cotton ball (dipped in alcohol) within the cup for a mere second, then withdrawing it, the acupuncturist reduces pressure in the cup just before it is placed on the skin, creating a vacuum. Because of the vacuum the skin and superficial muscle layer are drawn up into the cup.

Acupuncturists apply cups to certain acupuncture points, as well as to specific muscles that are affected by pain. This technique is used to promote blood circulation where there is blood stasis, relax tight muscles, alleviate stiffness and reduce swelling and pain.

Generally, during treatment the cup is left in place for about 10 minutes, then removed. Some bruising along the rim of the cup is expected and disappears within 2-4 days. Another method used is called 'sliding cupping'. This involves applying a Chinese medicated liniment to the skin, after which the

cups are gently slid over specific acupuncture points or muscle groups.

Cupping therapy is frequently used after treatment by acupuncture. Placement of the cups often follows the point selection pattern used for the acupuncture treatment, with somewhat greater emphasis on the use of back points, due to the ease of performing this technique there.

The history of cupping is over 1800 years old. The earliest description of cupping that is recorded is from the famous Taoist alchemist and herbalist Ge Hong (281-341 A.D.) in his book 'A Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies'. At that time the cups were actually made from animal horns. In a Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) book, cupping is prescribed for the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis as well as other respiratory disorders. More recently, during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.), Chinese medical texts dedicated entire chapters to the art of "fire cupping" using cups made of bamboo and pottery. They describe its effectiveness for the treatment of headache, dizziness, abdominal pain and the common cold.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century new glass cups were developed and continue to be used to this day. They were a helpful innovation for practitioners since the pottery cups broke easily and bamboo cups would deteriorate with repeated heating.

Today, as in the past Qing Dynasty, fire cupping is recommended for the treatment of pain, gastro-intestinal disorders, respiratory diseases (especially chronic cough and asthma), gynecological conditions, and last but not least, the common cold. ☀

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