

Moxibustion

HEAT THERAPY FOR A COLD CLIMATE

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Moxibustion (moxa for short) is an ancient form of heat therapy used in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is believed to have originated in the northern part of China as a way to combat illness and degenerative diseases associated with the extreme cold climate.

The term moxibustion is actually derived from the Japanese "mogusa" meaning herb and the Latin "bustion" meaning burning. Moxibustion involves the burning of moxa, which is created by compressing and rolling the powder from the dried leaves of the Mugwort plant into cone or stick form. Mugwort has a long history of use in folk medicine.


Amongst the many different moxibustion techniques, the most commonly used today are the cone and stick moxa. Cone moxa involves first placing heat shields on the skin at the carefully selected acupuncture points. These shields protect the skin from any heat damage. The cones are then lit and placed on top of the heat shields and promptly removed when they become too warm. A slice of ginger or a teaspoon of salt can also be used in place of the heat shields and is indicated for specific conditions, such as gastrointestinal problems.

Stick moxa involves lighting one end of a moxa stick (which is a cigar-like shape) then holding it an inch or two away from the area being treated for several minutes or until the area is warmed. The intensity of the heat is adjusted according to the patient's condition and comfort. Patient's report experiencing a pleasant warmth that penetrates deep into the skin.

The radiant heat produced by moxibustion penetrates deeply into the body, easing muscle tension and pain, and restoring normal blood flow and circulation. It is frequently and successfully used to treat inflammation. In addition, skillful moxibustion is extremely comforting and can create a deep relaxation response.

The benefits of moxibustion are many. It is effective in the treatment of chronic pain conditions, such as arthritis, back and neck pain, muscle stiffness, headaches and tendonitis. Because it can increase blood circulation to the pelvic area and uterus, it can be beneficial for many gynecological disorders. These include, irregular periods, infertility and menstrual cramping.

Its positive effects on immune function has been reported as early as 1927 by Dr. Shimetaro Hara, at the Kyushu University in Japan. More recently, a landmark study published in the



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Journal of the American Medical Association in 1998 found that up to 75% of women suffering from breech presentations before childbirth had fetuses that rotated to the normal position after receiving moxa at a specific acupuncture point. Other studies have shown that moxibustion reduces symptoms of menstrual cramps when used in conjunction with traditional acupuncture. Ongoing research in China examines the use of moxibustion in the treatment of ulcerative colitis with promising results.

Moxa has been used in conjunction with acupuncture to treat a variety of diseases throughout Asia for thousands of years. In fact, the actual Chinese character for what we routinely call acupuncture is "Zhen Jiu", translated literally, it means "needle-moxibustion". Moxibustion, which is so integral to the original concepts of acupuncture, has not been taught in depth in the Western acupuncture education training system. Thus, a number of practitioners today practice acupuncture using the needle method only. Using one without the other is like playing the piano with just one hand. ☀



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