

Cupping

Cupping is an effective manual therapy technique that involves using a partial vacuum cup on the surface of the skin. Cupping is used to assist in myofascial decompression, promote relaxation of the tissue, and to increase blood flow and circulation of the treatment area. Cupping is a common therapeutic procedure used by acupuncturists and other health care practitioners. There are several different cupping methods, all with varying therapeutic benefits: fire cupping, suction cupping, and wet cupping (cupping after the use of a lancet for therapeutic blood release).¹ There are a variety of types of cups including glass, plastic, bamboo and silicone.

Cupping has many functions, including warming and promoting the free flow of qi and blood, and reducing inflammation and pain. Cupping therapy causes stretching of the skin and dilation of the capillaries, stimulating an increase of blood flow and lymphatic flow that can result in decreasing myofascial pain.² Cupping has also been shown to be an effective treatment for the following: pain in the lower lumbar spine, shoulders, and legs; gastrointestinal disorders such as stomach ache, vomiting or diarrhea; and lung disease such as cough or asthma.³

It is not advisable to apply cupping to: a patient with: skin ulcer, edema, on an area overlying a large blood vessel, during periods of high fever, convulsions, abdominal and sacral regions of pregnant women.⁴

The application of cups may cause temporary discomfort, such as tightness, pressure, or pinching of the area treated. Post-treatment soreness and ecchymosis (discoloration of the skin) is a common result from cupping therapy. The discoloration will typically fade in 1-3 days post treatment, or a few days longer depending on the degree or severity of the underlying issue.

While uncommon, lightheadedness or dizziness, sweating, or nausea may be experienced. It is important to keep the area warm, covered from wind, and drink plenty of fluids after treatment, to avoid post treatment stiffness, cold and increase of pain to the surrounding areas.



¹ Finklestein, M; J.D., Mitchell, B; Skelton, W., & Turner, J. (2020). Cupping. In Brett, J. Clean Needle Technique: Best Practices for Acupuncture Needle Safety and Related Procedures (7th Ed, pp 31-40). Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

² Lowe, D., Cupping therapy: An analysis of the effects of suction on skin and possible influence on human health, Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice, Volume 29, 2017, PP 162-168.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1744388117304024>

³ Liangyue, D. et al., (1999) Moxibustion and Cupping Method: Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion (Rev Ed, pp 369-370). Foreign Language Press, Beijing.

⁴ Finklestein, M; J.D., Mitchell, B; Skelton, W., & Turner, J. (2020). Cupping. In Brett, J. Clean Needle Technique: Best Practices for Acupuncture Needle Safety and Related Procedures (7th Ed, pp 31-40). Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.