ART & SCIENCE of CUPPING

By now you've probably heard of or experienced cupping. Olympian swimmer Michael Phelps sporting nothing but a speedo and purple cupping circles while winning gold in 2016 drew a storm of media attention to this ancient healing practice. Hollywood movies (ie: The Godfather, part 2) have cupping scenes, while celebrities have exposed their cupping marks on the red carpet. If you have relatives from other parts of the world, perhaps you got to experience the benefits in childhood. Or maybe your first encounter with cupping was (or will be!) on your acupuncturist's treatment table.

Cupping therapy has managed to stay on trend for some years now, but it's long since proven its staying power. Cupping therapy spread throughout Europe during the renaissance. It dates back much further though, to ancient Egyptian, Greek, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures. One of the oldest medical textbooks in the world, the Ebers Papyrus, describes how the ancient Egyptians used cupping therapy in 1,550 B.C. [1]

China is famous for cupping and its use there also dates back thousands of years. The earliest record of cupping in China was from the Han Dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD).[2] Back then, cupping was applied using cattle horns or cross sections of bamboo. Now, Chinese Medicine Practitioners generally use round glass or plastic cups.

Traditionally, all cupping involved a flammable substance set on fire and placed in a cup. As the fire goes out, the cup is turned upside down on your skin, creating a vacuum.

Wet cupping involves bloodletting enhanced by the suction of the cups. This is thought to draw out thick, stagnant blood, generating healing through improved blood flow. **Dry cupping** is the more commonly used method in most modern clinics today, and is any type of cupping that doesn't involve a puncture to draw blood. During **stationary cupping** the cup is generally left in place for up to 3 minutes. **Moving (aka sliding) cupping**, is where the skin is lubricated with oil to allow for massage-like strokes with the cups as they create a gliding suction over areas of the body such as the back muscles. A convenient cupping tool used by many acupuncturists today uses a pump instead of fire to create the vacuum. This style allows for the use of smaller cups to work with bony joints and even face muscles. Some therapists also use silicone cups, which are easily maneuvered with a squeeze of the hand to create the desired level of suction.

Cupping is understood in TCM to assist with qi and blood flow. It also opens the pores to draw out pathogenic factors such as wind, cold, damp and heat. Biomedical research has found that, cupping does, in fact, increase local blood flow through microcirculation and capillary cell repair[3], and wet cupping has been shown to help remove toxins from the blood.[4]

One of the reasons it has stood the test of time is because it is safe and beneficial for so many conditions. Here are some examples of uses where research supports effectiveness[5,6]:

- Immune Support
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Cholesterol Management
- Asthma
- Cellulitis
- Migraines
- Shingles
- Facial Paralysis
- Osteoarthritis
- Insomnia
- Depression

So, the big question: **How does it feel**?
Like a massage! (especially the sliding cups) but instead of a push you feel a pull. Patients sometimes describe it as 'a good hurt', followed by a release of pressure. A good practitioner will communicate with you to find your balance point to make sure it is a relaxing, comfortable experience. And yes, you may leave with the famous 'cupping marks', but these are not bruises, as they are not caused by injury and do not hurt, rather they are evidence that stagnation has been released.

While it is generally considered a very safe technique, it is important to make sure your practitioner is skilled and taking proper precautions. Licensed Acupuncturists have extensive training in cupping, so call today and experience the benefits yourself!

[1] https://melbournenaturaltherapies.com.au/the-history-of-cupping/
[2] https://kootenaycolumbiacollege.com/the-history-of-chinese-medicine-cupping/
[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4488563/
[4] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25453524/
[5] https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/cupping-therapy
[6] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4488563/

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