

What is Cupping Therapy? and what can it do for you?

By Nir Saar R.Ac

(Registered Acupuncturist with the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario)

We all have seen Michael Phelps and the red marks on his back during the Olympic games, those images have started a trend of curiosity among us Canadians.



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So what is Cupping Therapy, where does it come from and why are Olympians using these treatments?

Cupping Therapy is the use of specialized cups that are made out of thick round lipped glass or durable thick plastic. Using these cups the practitioner creates a vacuum on the tissue usually in areas on the body that have a layer of muscle. This creates suction which secures the cup in place on the specific tissue leaving circular red marks on the skin that usually stay there for a few days, disappearing after approximately a week. The suction cup stays on the tissue for 5-20 minutes to get the full effect of the treatment.

The Effects of Cupping Therapy

The cup suction can affect our bodies in a variety of ways. It can:

1. Create a relaxation of muscles and local tissues.
2. Break adhesions in the connective tissues around muscles and this can significantly improve the flexibility of tissue (ex. Shoulder muscles).
3. Break small capillaries in the skin promoting blood flow in the area and increasing healing to injured tissues.
4. Detoxify tissues which have been chronically tight and inflexible.
5. Accelerate effect of acupuncture treatment for pain (ex. frozen shoulder).

According to some sources, the oldest recorded use of cupping was by the Egyptians at around 3000 BC and later on by the Ancient Greeks 400 BC, the people of the Sahara Desert, the ancient Chinese and by Eastern Europeans. Cupping has been used by many traditions of natural medicine.



The tradition that I represent and use in my practice is the tradition of Chinese Medicine. Chinese Medicine cupping creates an opening of blockages, detoxifies the body and strengthens the functioning of the lungs and immune system.

Chinese Medicine Cupping Therapy is often used in combination with acupuncture.

Acupuncture, when practised in its holistic context of traditional Chinese medicine is a very potent medicine that can help the body neurologically normalize different areas such as muscles, tissues, internal organs and gland secretion in order for the person to achieve optimal health.

When acupuncture is used to treat pain or internal conditions, most of the needles will not be positioned where the pain or the issue is but rather distally (on the arms or the legs) and using the knowledge of the medicine to normalize the body via meridian or acupuncture points that are able to affect that tissue.

When using a combination of this style of acupuncture and cupping, cups can be positioned over the area where the painful/blocked tissue is and the needles will be inserted on the legs or arms to create a combined and amplified effect for the issues that are being treated.

An example of when this treatment combination is used is if a patient has a tight upper back or pain at the back of their neck or a patient is suffering from a frozen shoulder, acupuncture needles will be applied to points on the arms from elbow down and on the legs from the knee down to neurologically sedate and relax the shoulder / neck / upper back and then suction cupping will be applied to the shoulder / upper back or neck to further relax the tissue and increase blood flow to the area.

Types of Cupping Therapy

In Chinese Medicine, there are a few ways to apply Cupping Therapy.

Dry Cupping – Suction cups are applied directly to the painful / tight area.

Wet Cupping – Acupuncture needles are applied to the local area where the pain or tightness is and then suction cups are applied over the acupuncture needles. This creates bleeding where the needles are inserted which opens up and enables blood flow to the area that has been blocked and chronically tight.

Old school Chinese Medicine practitioners might use wet cupping since it is very powerful. I prefer using **Dry Cupping** as it is a less 'aggressive' approach.

Fire Cupping vs Pump Cupping

Fire Cupping uses specialized thick glass cups that are heat resistant. The vacuum effect is created when a cotton ball dipped in alcohol is lit on fire, put inside the cup, taken out quickly and the cup is quickly applied to the patient's skin. The temperature difference creates a vacuum that allows the cup to latch onto the skin of the patient.

Pump Cupping uses specialized thick plastic cups and fire is not used. There is a valve at the top of the cup and a small hand pump is used by the practitioner to create a vacuum in the cup for the suction effect.

I prefer to use the latter technique since no fire is being used and I am better able to control the amount of suction that is preferred by my client.

Why should I have Cupping done on me?

Cupping is a great way to relax chronically tight tissue, encourage a detox effect in the local tissue, improve range of motion in major joints and is quite frankly a very relaxing procedure to experience. It can also improve the effect of acupuncture treatments especially when it is done for pain relief, hip pain, lower back pain and shoulder pain.

Ready to feel like Michael Phelps, just for a day!

Nir Saar is a Registered Acupuncturist that focuses on the treatment of **acute and chronic pain**, using **distal acupuncture techniques** to treat the whole body and to achieve optimal health.

Practising in Kitchener Ont and Stratford Ont, Canada.

For More information please visit my website at:

www.zen-needle.ca

