

FACT SHEET

Cupping

Cupping is an ancient technique used in traditional Chinese medicine to stimulate acupuncture points or larger areas of the body. It is often practised alongside acupuncture but can also be a 'stand-alone' treatment.

The technique involves creating a vacuum inside round glass or bamboo cups by inserting a naked flame and removing it, then placing the cup quickly onto the area to be treated before the vacuum is lost. The cups are then left in place for anything up to 20 minutes.



Cupping is most commonly used to treat colds and flu by shifting congestion in the chest and/or to relieve muscle and joint pain. It can also be used to treat digestive and gynaecological problems and to draw out toxins from the body.

If large areas of the body need treating, a technique known as 'sliding cups' is used. A thin layer of massage oil is spread over the skin; the cups are placed onto the body in the normal way and then slid along the muscles being treated. This helps the blood and *qi* to flow more easily in stagnated areas.

Cupping is not painful but can leave slightly red patches on the skin, like circular bruises. Although these marks resemble bruises, the muscles have not been traumatized in any way. The redness on the skin indicates that there has been movement in the circulation of blood under and around the cups. Not all cupping treatments will result in redness as this depends on the complaint being addressed.

Cupping should be carried out by a properly trained practitioner, as there are contraindications for its use.

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