

FACT SHEET

Moxibustion (Moxa)

Moxibustion is a procedure whereby moxa - a dried herb, usually of the species mugwort (Latin name: *Artemisia vulgaris*) - is used either directly on the skin or just above the skin over specific acupuncture points or meridians. The herb is lit and as it smoulders slowly, heat permeates into the body and affects the flow of *qi* (energy) and blood in the area being treated. Moxa is usually used when the patient's complaint is diagnosed as a 'cold' condition.



Moxa sticks are commonly used in more generalised areas (indirect moxibustion). The sticks resemble a large cigar or an oversized incense stick, which is lit at one end and then held about an inch above the point or area to be treated. The stick is usually rotated or a 'pecking' motion is used to allow the heat to penetrate the body. Direct moxibustion is more commonly used for specific areas that need treatment. Practitioners shape moxa into a tiny cone and place it directly onto the body. The cone is removed as soon as the patient feels heat.

The choice of when, where and which form of moxibustion to use is a matter of clinical judgement for the properly trained practitioner as care is needed to ensure that the burning moxa does not make direct contact with the skin.

Moxibustion is an essential part of Chinese medicine and cannot be omitted or substituted in most cases. As is the case with numerous other products, moxa has an odour when it burns. Although this odour is considered by many to be therapeutic, some people can be allergic to the smoke generated or to the odour itself in which case a smokeless variety can be found and utilised.

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