

# What Does Cupping Do?

- Relaxes muscles
- Reduces pain
- Improves blood and energy circulation
- Modulates the immune system
- Reduces inflammation
- Drains toxins
- Stimulates lymphatic and fascia system
- Expectorates phlegm
- Destroys fat tissues
- Balances internal organs
- Removes noxious materials and gases
- Lowers cholesterol and glucose level
- Calms down the mind



A relief shows cupping tools in the temple of Kom Ombo in Southern Upper Egypt.

Cupping therapy was mentioned in the famous Papyrus Ebers, which is one of the oldest medical textbooks, in Ancient Egypt (1550 BC).

## HISTORY

Although the true origin of cupping remains uncertain, it is widely believed that the practice of suction has been the part of therapeutic procedures throughout human history. The use of suction cups for treatment is found in ancient Egyptian, Hindu, Greek, and Chinese writings. Even before metal or glass was used, ancient people performed a cupping therapy with animal horns, bones, bamboo, gourds, or seashells.

The Ebers Papyrus, written sometime around 1550 B.C., considered one of the oldest medical textbooks in the Western world, describes how the Egyptians used cupping to help cure some frequent medical issues and how it was also used by Saharan peoples. Hippocrates, the famous Greek physician, used this technique around 400 B.C. to treat internal disease and some structural problems.

Ge Hong (281-341 A.D.), a minor southern official during the Jin Dynasty, was responsible for its first known use in China. He was interested in alchemy, herbalism and techniques of longevity. Ge popularized the saying, "Acupuncture and cupping, more than half of the ills cured." Later on, this method found its way throughout Asia and Europe. In 1465, Serefeddin Sabuncuoglu, a Turkish surgeon,

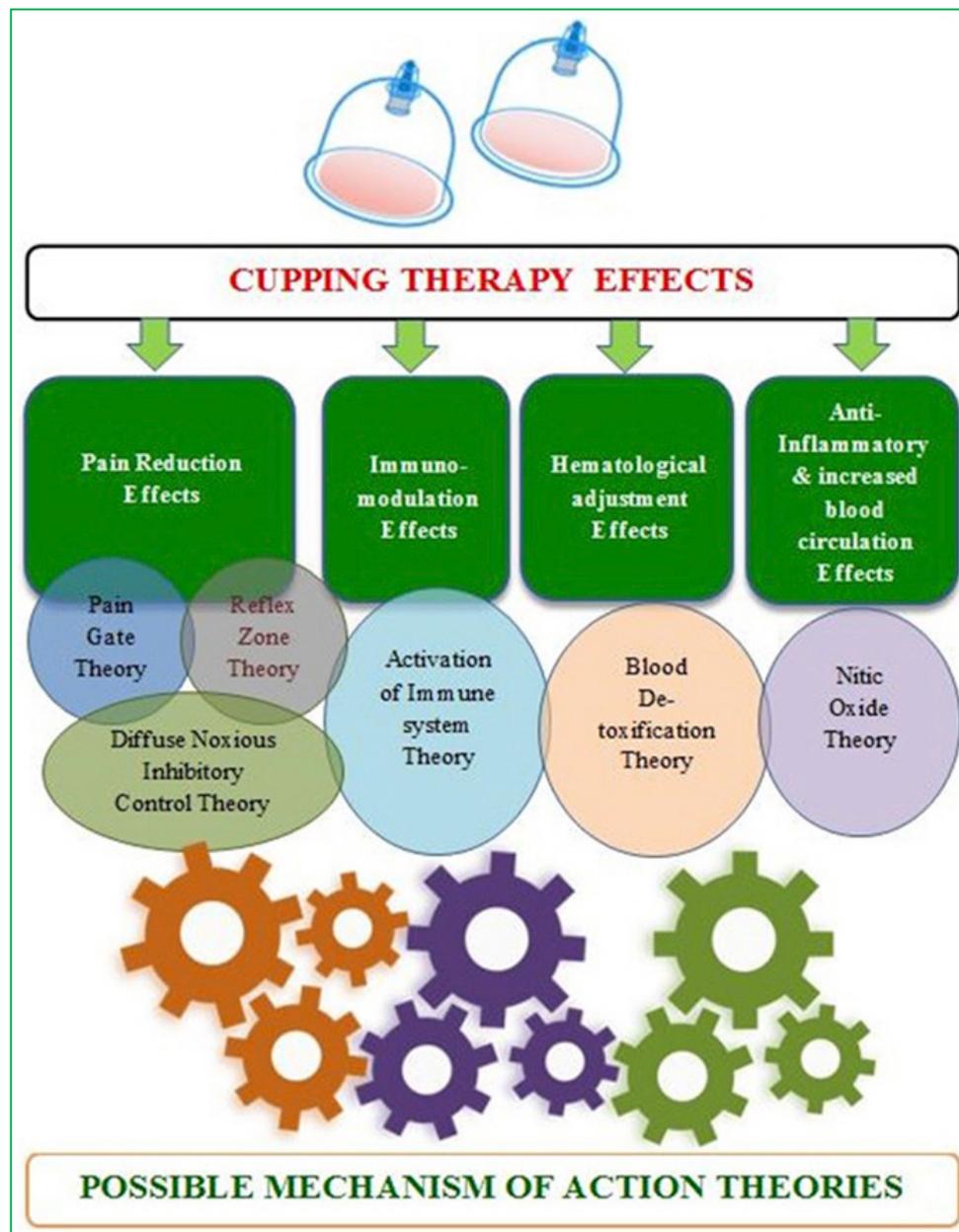
recommended this technique, which he called "mihceme." In Japan, cupping (*kyukaku*) is still used, together with some acupuncture and massage techniques.



Greco-Roman cupping vessels and Roman bronze rectal speculum from the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum

The Islamic world adopted the cupping therapy about 1,400 years ago. Prophet Muhammad described it as the best of all medicine, and they developed their unique method called Hijama.

In Western medicine, there are many doctors who actually performed a cupping therapy in their practice such as Maitre Henri de Mondeville (1260-1320), a surgeon to King Phillippe of France, Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), a Dutch physician who is regarded as the founder of clinical teaching and the modern academic hospital concept, Richard Mead (1673-1754), one of the brilliant English physicians. John Huxham (1672-1768), who is notable for his study of fevers, William Herberden (1767-1845), who presented classic description of angina pectoris, Dominique Jean Larrey (1766-1842), the father of modern military surgery, Samuel Bayfield, the author of "A Treatise on Practical Cupping" which is the most comprehensive books on cupping written in the 19th century, Marshall Hall (1790-1857) who was a prominent English physician, William Osler (1849-1919), a Canadian physician who is considered the father of modern medicine.



Abdullah M.N. Al-Bedah, et al. "The medical perspective of cupping therapy: Effects and mechanisms of action" Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2019.

## EFFECTS

1. Cupping induces comfort and relaxation on a systemic level and the resulting increase in endogenous opioid production in the brain leads to improved pain control.

2. It enhances the circulation of blood and to remove toxins and waste from the body through improving microcirculation, promoting capillary endothelial cell repair, accelerating granulation and angiogenesis in the regional tissues, thus helping normalize the patient's functional state and progressive muscle relaxation.

3. It removes noxious materials from skin microcirculation and interstitial compartment reducing low density lipoprotein (LDL) in men and consequently may have a preventive effect against atherosclerosis and cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). Cupping is known to significantly decrease in total cholesterol, low density lipoprotein LDL/high density lipoprotein (HDL) ratio.

4. Loss of blood along with vasodilation tends to increase the parasympathetic activity and relaxes the body muscles which benefit the patient and could also be associated with the after effects of cupping.

5. It drains excess fluids and toxins, loosens adhesions and revitalizes connective tissue, increases blood flow to skin and muscles, stimulates the peripheral nervous system, reduces pain, controls high blood pressure and modulates the immune system.

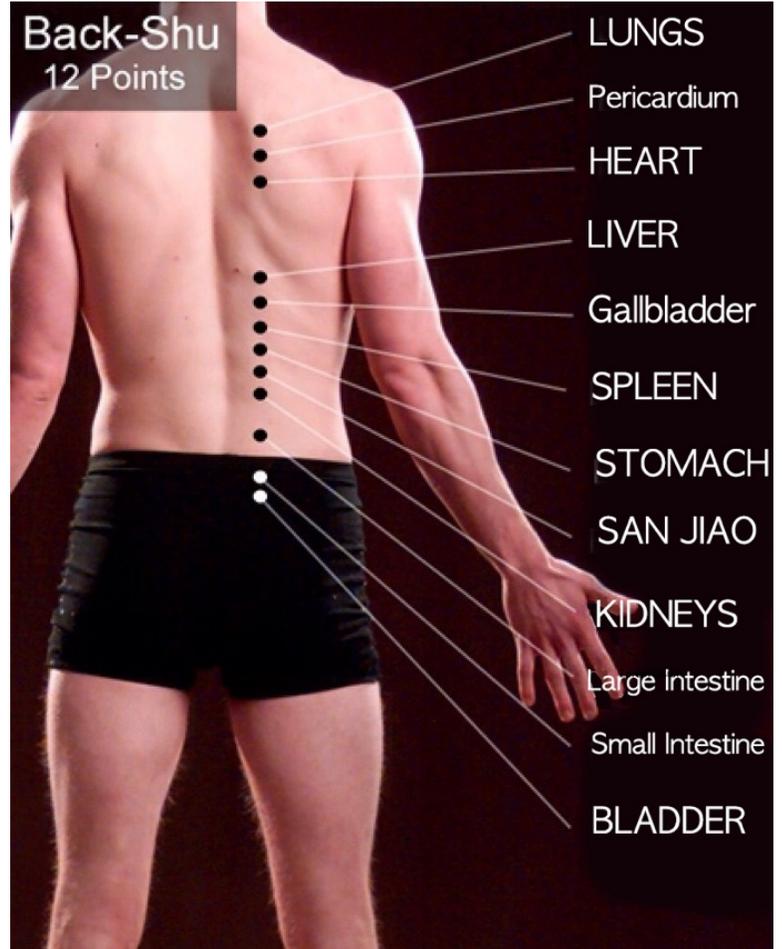
6. Blood vessels are dilated by the action of certain vasodilators such as adenosine, noradrenaline and histamine. Consequently, there is an increase in the circulation of blood to the ill area. This allows the immediate elimination of trapped toxins in the tissues

7. It improves subcutaneous blood flow and stimulates the autonomic nervous system. The stimulation of the skin causes several autonomic, hormonal, and immune reactions attributed to the sympathetic and parasympathetic efferent nerves to the somato-visceral reflexes related to the organs.

8. Cupping is reported to restore sympathovagal balance and can be cardio-protective by stimulating the peripheral sympathetic and para-sympathetic nervous system.

9. It plays a role in the activation of complement system as well as modulation of cellular part of immune system.

10. There is significant reduction in blood sugar in diabetic patients after cupping. It changes in the biomechanical properties of the skin, increases immediate pain thresholds, significantly reduces peripheral and local P substance, and reduces the inflammation.



Cupping balances the internal organs by stimulating Back-Shu points.



A Greek bronze cupping cup, excavated in Syracuse

Hippocrates who was born around 400 B.C. is a well-known Greek physician.

He advocated cupping for gynecological complaints, back and extremity illnesses, pharyngitis, lung diseases, and ear ailments.

## THE MECHANISMS OF CUPPING THERAPY

### 1. Pain-Gait Theory

This theory comprehensively explains how the pain is transmitted from the point of its inception to the brain, and how it is processed in the brain which sends back the efferent, protective signal to the stimulated or injured area. It is reported that local damage of the skin and capillary vessels acts as a nociceptive stimulus. This is explanation based on a neuronal hypothesis whereby cupping influences chronic pain by altering the signal processing at the level of the nociceptors both of the spinal cord and brain.

### 2. Diffuse Noxious Inhibitory Controls

Diffuse Noxious Inhibitory Controls signify inhibition of activity in convergent or wide dynamic range-type nociceptive spinal neurons triggered by a second, spatially remote, noxious stimulus. This phenomenon is thought to underlie the principle of counter-irritation to reduce pain.

### 3. Reflex Zone

In cupping therapy, when the diseased organ sends a signal to the skin through the autonomic nerves, the skin responds by becoming tender and painful with swelling. Skin receptors are activated when cups are applied to the skin. The entire process will result in the increment of the blood circulation and blood supply to the skin and the internal organs through the neural connections.

### 4. Release of Nitric Oxide

Nitric Oxide (NO) is a signaling gas molecule that mediates vasodilatation and regulates blood flow and volume. Nitric Oxide regulates blood pressure, contributes to the immune responses, controls neurotransmission and participates in cell differentiation and in many more physiological functions. Cupping therapy could cause release of Nitric Oxide from endothelial cells and, hence, induce certain beneficial biological changes.

### 5. Activation of Immune System

Cupping decreases serum IgE and IL-2 levels and increases serum C3 levels which are found to be abnormal in the immune system. cupping increases the level of immune products such as interferon and tumor necrotizing factor. Cupping effect on the thymus increases the flow of lymph in the lymphatic system.

### 6. Blood Detoxification

The negative pressure suction produced by cupping benefits the extraction of the toxins generated by the purulent fluid, exudation, and germs, as well as the histolytic enzyme. Cupping also promotes the growth of granulation and the recovery of wounds.

Precision Acupuncture, Inc.  
Dr. Choi, *doctor of acupuncture, functional nutritionist*  
833-321-1010, [doctor@precisionacu.org](mailto:doctor@precisionacu.org)  
<http://precisionacu.org>

#### REFERENCES

- A.M.N. Al-Bedah et al. "Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine 9" (2019) 90-97  
Park, Young Ki. "Modern and Ancient Cupping therapy" (2021)  
Ki, Junsung. "The Miracle of Cupping Therapy"  
Rozenfeld, E. & Kalichman, L. New is the well-forgotten old: The use of dry cupping in musculoskeletal medicine. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* 20, 173–178, (2016).  
Mehta, P. & Dhaple, V. Cupping therapy: A prudent remedy for a plethora of medical ailments. *J Tradit Complement Med* 5, 127–134, (2015).  
Vakilinia, S. R., Bayat, D. & Asghari, M. Hijama (Wet Cupping or Dry Cupping) for Diabetes Treatment. *Iran J Med Sci* 41, S37 (2016). Kravetz, R. E. Cupping glass. *Am J Gastroenterol* 99, 1418, (2004).