



Ancient Healing FOR MODERN LIFE

How Chinese Cupping Therapy Can Support Overall Wellness

By Dr. Yana Symonenko, L.Ac

Have you ever watched the Olympic Games and wondered about the mysterious circular marks on the backs and shoulders of elite athletes? One of my patients affectionately refers to them as “octopus kisses.” What may appear to be a modern wellness trend is actually an ancient healing practice with roots stretching back thousands of years.

Cupping therapy gained worldwide attention after Olympic swimmers and other professional athletes proudly displayed their distinctive circular marks. Yet long before athletes and social media brought this therapy into the spotlight, cupping was a trusted tool within Chinese medicine. Doctors have long used it to relieve pain, support recovery, improve circulation, and promote overall well-being.

Chinese medicine is an ancient holistic system that recognizes the deep connection between the body, mind, spirit, and the universe around and within us. Rather than focusing solely on symptoms, it seeks to identify and address the underlying patterns of imbalance that contribute to discomfort and disease. Among its many therapeutic techniques, cupping continues to offer a natural, effective approach to healing that remains remarkably useful in our modern world.

What Is Cupping Therapy?

Cupping therapy is one of the oldest treatment methods in Chinese medicine, using cups to create suction on the skin and underlying tissues. Unlike many modern interventions, cupping does not introduce substances into the body, making it a noninvasive treatment.

Instead, it works by stimulating the body's own natural healing responses and supporting its ability to restore balance.

From a Chinese medicine perspective, pain and dysfunction often arise when the flow of Qi (vital energy) and blood becomes restricted because of injury, stress, overuse, poor posture, or emotional strain. The gentle suction created by the cups lifts the skin and fascial layers, increasing circulation to the treated area. This enhanced blood flow may help nourish tissues, relax tight muscles, and support the removal of metabolic waste products that contribute to soreness and discomfort. Many patients describe feeling lighter, looser, more relaxed, and experiencing improved mobility after treatment.

Although cupping marks may resemble bruises, they form through a very different process. Bruises result when direct impact or force damages blood vessels. Cupping uses negative pressure instead, drawing blood toward the skin's surface without causing the same type of tissue injury associated with a bruise. The color and intensity of the marks vary from person to person and may reflect the degree of stagnation and circulation in the treated area. As healing progresses, the marks gradually fade without the color changes typically associated with traumatic bruising. In Chinese medicine, practitioners also use the appearance of these marks as one of many diagnostic clues to help guide future treatment.

Today, cups are commonly made from glass, silicone, or medical-grade plastic. Cupping is used for musculoskeletal pain, sports



recovery, stress-related tension, and respiratory conditions such as seasonal allergies, asthma, congestion due to influenza, and bronchopneumonia.

Different Types of Cupping

Dry cupping, sometimes called bloodless cupping, is the most common form used in modern acupuncture clinics. A cup is placed on the skin, and suction is created using either heat or a mechanical pump. The skin gently rises into the cup, producing increased circulation and a therapeutic response in the tissues beneath.

Cupping massage combines suction with movement. After applying oil to the skin, the practitioner glides the cup across the treatment area. This technique is particularly useful for muscle tightness, “knots,” and areas of chronic tension.

Wet cupping, also known as blood cupping, is a traditional technique in which tiny superficial skin openings are made with a medical

lancet before the cup is applied, allowing a small amount of blood to be drawn. This bloodletting technique should be performed by a licensed acupuncturist because it requires additional training and sterile technique and is not appropriate for everyone. Many modern acupuncture clinics primarily use dry cupping and cupping massage.

One of the most common questions I hear is, “Does cupping hurt?” In most cases, the answer is no. While the sensation is unusual, it is often described as a deep stretching or pulling feeling.

Safety and Contraindications

Cupping therapy is generally considered safe when performed by a licensed acupuncturist. However, it may not be appropriate for everyone. It is typically avoided over open wounds, burns, active skin infections, fractures, sunburn, known skin cancers or tumors, swelling of unknown origin, or areas affected by deep vein thrombosis. Individuals taking blood-thinning medications or those with certain bleeding disorders may require modifications or should avoid treatment. A practitioner will also determine whether cupping is suitable for people with a history of fainting, anemia, pregnancy, or extreme exhaustion or dehydration.

Despite its ancient origins, cupping therapy remains remarkably relevant in today’s fast-paced world. Those distinctive circular marks seen on Olympic athletes represent far more than a passing wellness trend. They reflect one of the oldest healing traditions still practiced today. While modern research continues to explore the mechanisms behind cupping, many people seek this therapy because it supports a fundamental principle shared by both traditional and modern healthcare: the body has an incredible ability to heal when given the right support.

*“If you dismiss and neglect the experience
of the ancients and believe that
you will find the right path only in the
newest treatments, you fool yourself
and the people around you.”
—Hippocrates*



Mind & Body ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Yana Symonenko is the founder of AcupunctureRocks in Santa Clara and holds a doctorate in acupuncture and Chinese medicine from Pacific College of Health & Science. Guided by an “East Meets West” approach, she combines the wisdom of ancient healing practices with a strong foundation in Western medicine to provide personalized, holistic care that addresses the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of health. Through acupuncture, she helps patients restore balance, enhance well-being, and deepen their connection to self-awareness and consciousness.

Outside of her practice, Dr. Symonenko enjoys yoga and breathwork, hiking with her dogs, traveling, preparing nourishing meals, expanding her medical knowledge, and building a strong, supportive community centered on health and wellness. Visit AcupunctureRocks.com to learn more.