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Benefits of cupping therapy (Hijamat): Unani medicine perspective

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Abstract

Cupping therapy is an ancient customary and complementary medicine practice. There is developing proof of its expected advantages in the treatment of certain illnesses, particularly pain related conditions. Now days, wet cupping become more popular due to its efficacy. Cupping therapy is a method of healing by applying vacuum inside cup either by heat or manual suction apparatus. Cupping as used for thousands of years by pharaohs and ancient Egyptians. It is an Arabic word derived from the term "hajam" volume and literally stand for "to restore to basic size" or to minimize. Cupping or Hijamah is a method used for local evacuation or diversion of morbid humour. Cupping is one of the oldest and frequently practiced regimental therapies, which is indicated in various diseases, e.g. arthritis, migraine, asthma, headache, hemorrhoids, etc. alone or in combination with other therapies. Through this paper we want to explore the tremendous beneficial effect of cupping in many diseases such as Rheumatoid arthritis, hypertension migraine carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoarthritis, backache sciatica etc., As we seen that cupping is very beneficial to alleviate the symptoms of these diseases. This paper explains the phenomenon of cupping which are based on scientific approach.

Keywords: Cupping therapy, Unani medicine system, Hijamah, Regimental therapy, Causative pathological agents

Introduction

Unani System of Medicine established by Hippocrates in 460-377 BC depends on the idea of adjusting body humors. Their misbalance causes diseases, while reclamation of the parity prompts wellbeing. Unani medication includes 4 elements earth, air, water, fire; 4 natures-cold, hot, wet and dry, and 4 Humors- *Blood* or Sanguineous silliness (which is hot And wet), *Mucus* (cold and wet), *Yellow Bile* or cholera (hot and dry), and *Dark Bile Or Melancholia* (cold and Dry) ^[1]. Unani System of Medicine endeavors to locate the best potential ways by which an individual can lead a healthy life with least disorder. It depicts 6 basic components for keeping up wellbeing and preventing diseases called Asbab-e-Sittah-e-Zaruriah, which includes- air, food and drinks, bodily movement and repose, psychic movement and repose, sleep and wakefulness and evacuation and retention. All diseases can be treated on by pharmacotherapy (Ilaj-bid dawa), in which drugs of animal, mineral or plant origin cause are utilized in crude form, either as single drug or in compound form; regimental treatment (Ilaj-bil-tadbir) in which Unani doctors have described different methods like cupping (Hijamat), Massage (Dalak), exercise (Riyazat), Turkish bath (Hammam), venescation (Fasd), leeching (Taleeque), and Cautrization (Aml-e- Kai). It also incorporates dietotherapy (Ilaj-bil-ghiza) in which adjustment in the quality and quantity of the diet is done, depending on the nature of the disease and surgery (Ilaj-bil-yad) if unavoidable. Unani doctors have also laid emphasis on physic (Tabi'at) by which body works physiologically and opposes against diseases (Taddiyah). If it is strong, the body functions smoothly; if it is weak, the risk of illness increases. Cupping or Hijamat is a strategy utilized for local evacuation or diversion of morbid matters in which a horn (singhi) is attached to the surface of the skin of the disease part through negative pressure created by vacuum ^[2]. The vacuum is made by the introduction of heat or suction. In the late period, a glass cup replaces the horn and hence the procedure came to be known as cupping. Older methods employ the use of alcohol soaked cotton at the base of brass, steel or glass cups, which is subsequently lit on fire ^[3]. The heating and then cooling of the gases inside the closed system causes a vacuum and suctioning effect. The edge of the cup is put on the patient's skin as the fire dies

out and the vacuum pulls the skin into the cup. The suction of skin into the cup causes trauma to superficial vessels, causing ecchymosed and purpura in a circular arrangement. Cupping is a widely discussed therapeutic regimen in the Unani classical literature. Physicians have been showing its utilization for different illnesses. As per the Unani System of Medicine, illnesses are expected to the unbalanced distribution of humors or Akhlat (blood or dam, mucus or balgham, bile or safra, dark bile or sauda) inside the body [4]. These humors, which are out of proportion, gather in different parts of the body at times producing inflammation, and prompting presentation of various diseases, for example in case of arthritis, the humors collect in the joints, thereby leading to pain, swelling, joint immobilization and other articular tissue damage [5, 6].

Classification of cupping therapy

Unani Physicians have classified Cupping into two broad groups, *Hijamat bilshurt* (cupping with blood-letting) and *Hijamat bilashurt* (cupping without bloodletting). These can be done in two ways, vacuum is created by using fire (*Bil-naar*) and vacuum is created not by fire (*Bilanaar*), but instead suction pumps or manual suction is used to create a vacuum that helps in the adhesion of the cup [4, 6-15]. Cupping with blood-letting or wet cupping involves the incising of skin either before the cup is placed or during the process of suctioning with needles placed at the base of the cup being used [16]. Also, lubricants have been used to move the cup around once it is placed on the skin to cover a wider area [17]. Sets of 4, 6 or 10 cups are applied for 5, 10 or more minutes and repeated on every 4-6 months depending on the nature of the disease [18]. The areas being treated are usually rotated, but the sites which are common on which the cups have been applied are the back, chest, abdomen, and buttock, however, other areas, including the face, are known to be treated [19]. The second and third hours of the day are the best time for cupping. Cupping should not be done soon after the shower however need to sit for one hour with the exception of if there should arise an occurrence of blood thickening [20].

Mechanism of action and reported results of cupping therapy

Cupping therapy has a pivotal role in for health promotion, preventive, and therapeutic purposes.

Cupping therapy has reported benefit effects in the treatment of lower back pain, neck and shoulder pain, headache and migraine, knee pain, facial paralysis, brachialgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, rheumatoid arthritis, and asthma [21]. Different hypotheses are given about the advantages of the Cupping therapy. One hypothesis proposes that it is by increasing circulation around the area of cupping and allowing for the elimination of toxins trapped in the tissues [18]. Another hypothesis proposes that it is the procedure of transferring discomfort and even pathology from one site to another that may cure the original site of any disease [20]. The psychosomatic theory also exists that explains the effect of cupping as purely a placebo effect [18]. Cupping with blood-letting works according to the principle of *Tanqiya-e-Mavad*, [8, 10] i.e. evacuation of morbid matters from the affected area. It also improves circulation to the area and provides better nutrition to the area, where it is applied. Cupping without blood-letting works on the principle of *Imala-e-mavad*. [8, 10] i.e. diversion of morbid humors from one site to the other.

Indications of cupping therapy as per disease condition

The diseases can be can be classified into localized diseases (neck pain, lower back pain, and knee pain) and systematic diseases (diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and rheumatoid arthritis) [21]. Cupping has been utilized for various ailments. Different type of cupping is indicated in different diseases. *Hijamat bil-shurt* is used in different diseases like heaviness of head, asthma, dyspnoea, migraine, quinsy, palpitation, cerebral pain, hemorrhoids, amenorrhoea, renal and ureteric colic, plethora, pustules and boils, sciatica, gout, pain of the knee, sicknesses of the liver, spleen and psoriasis, and so on. [7, 10, 14, 22, 23] *Hijamat bilashurt* is used in various diseases like excessive menstrual bleeding, removal of deep swelling, scrotal hernia, sciatica, piles, hydrocele, gout, renal calculi and epsistaxis, etc., [10] Cupping is mainly described as treatment for chronic pain including lower back pain and headache. Recent reports described its use for other nonspecific disease processes including migraine, Cough, arthritis, acute trigeminal neuralgia, indigestion and menstrual disturbance, acne, pneumonia and acute myelitis, Chronic urticaria, fibromyalgia syndrome, acute facial paralysis and ankylosing spondylitis. [1, 23-35] Cupping causes blood be attracted to the outside of the skin, which can cause red marks, swelling, and bruising. No serious side effects has reported from the cupping except one case of panniculitis [26]. Wet cupping may enhance the risk of infection, as the skin barrier is compromised. Physicians have suspected physical abuse when the lesions are found in children leading to misdiagnosis [27]. So, it is inferred that cupping therapy (*Hijamat*) has unique features that are easily recognized. Efficacy and safety of the therapy in different diseases as indicated by the Unani physicians can be assessed on modern parameters, and can be utilized single or as an adjuvant with other therapies, so that the therapy becomes more commonly used for the treatment of various diseases.

Sites of cupping therapy as per disease condition

The sites for cupping therapy are selected according to the treated ailment. The most common site of application is back, followed by the chest, abdomen, buttocks, and legs. Other areas, such as the face, may also be treated by cupping [21]. Cupping is applied on different parts of the body for different diseases are as follows;

1. Nape of the neck: Fetor of the mouth, headache, meningitis, diphtheria, Stomatitis, Conjunctivitis [19], [19]
2. Calf muscles: Renal colic, metritis, amenorrhoea [1, 19].
3. Over the loins: inflammatory masses in upper part of thigh, scabies, pustules, elephantiasis, hemorrhoids [1, 19].
4. Extremities : Headache, meningitis, hyperpyrexia [19]
5. Between the shoulder blades: Hemomptysis [18], pain in upper arms and throat [1, 19]
6. Umbilicus : Renal colic, gastralgia and metritis [19]
7. Below mammary gland: Menorrhagia and puerperal disease [19]
8. Under the chin: Cleanses head and jaw [1]
9. In front of thigh: Orchitis, leg ulcers [1]

Containdications

The contraindications of cupping therapy are classified into absolute and relative contraindications. Although, we have sufficient data with respect to the safety of cupping therapy, it is totally contraindicated in disease patients with any organ failure (renal failure, hepatic failure, also, cardiovascular failure) as well as in cancer patients. It is

likewise completely contraindicated in patients utilizing a pacemaker and those experiencing hemophilia or similar conditions. Relative cupping therapy contraindications include acute infection, using anticoagulants, serious constant infection, (for example, heart ailments), pregnancy, puerperium, menstruation, iron deficiency, recent wet cupping session, recent blood donation, health related crises, and patient's refusal of the procedure [21].

Adverse events/ side effects

Cupping therapy adverse events (AEs) are rarely reported and it's safe. Most Adverse effects are mild to moderate in severity [21]. Some of the most Adverse effects identified with cupping therapy are scar formations, trailed by burns. Other observed Adverse effects are migraine, pruritus, dizziness, sleepiness, muscle strain, iron deficiency, sickness, bullae formation, small hematoma or pain at cupping site, abscess, skin disease, sleep deprivation, hyperpigmentation, and vasovagal violent attack [21].

Infection control measures

The basic part of any disease control program is hand washing. Wearing personal protective equipment, for example, gloves, masks, protective eyewear, and gowns is playing important role in controlling the infection. Sterilization of the skin before cupping by US Food and Drug Organization (FDA)- affirmed or emergency clinic grade arrangements is significant [21]. Disinfection of patients' beds or utilizing dispensable plastic bed blankets is also crucial after treating every patient. Following clinical waste isolation and disposal guidelines is essential, using disposal cups, vacuum pumps, and surgical blades is recommended. Try to use a secondary disposal container for lubricants/skin disinfectants used on a single patient before disposal. Use on another patient is restricted [21].

Conclusion

There are various methods available in Unani medicine to cure diseases. Cupping therapy is very beneficial antiquated conventional and integral medicine practice. There is creating proof of its likely advantages in the treatment of certain diseases, particularly pain related conditions. This Paper recommended another mode of treatment of the diseases especially, painful conditions without side effects or any hazardous reaction. Cupping therapy is appropriate to treat numerous diseases as compare to other medications.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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