

Cupping is a form of therapy widely used in [Traditional Chinese Medicine](#) (TCM) and is often used in conjunction with acupuncture or massage therapy.

Cupping works by pulling blood to a small region on the body, creating a vacuum on the patient's skin. The purpose is to stimulate healing, dispel stagnation, draw out toxins, enhance blood flow and soothe muscle pain. It helps the tissue get new blood flow and causes anti-inflammatory chemicals in the body to be released. It is effective at stretching tight fascia and muscles.

According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), cupping also improves qi flow, bringing health and vitality into the body.

Cupping History

In both Eastern and Western cultures, cupping evolved from shamanistic practices that held the belief that illnesses and infirmities can be sucked out of the body.

The Ebers Papyrus, written c. 1550 BC, 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 c. 400 BC to treat internal disease and some structural problems.

It dates back to ancient Egyptian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern cultures. One of the oldest medical textbooks in the world, the *Ebers Papyrus*, describes how the ancient Egyptians used cupping therapy in 1,550 B.C.

Cupping Methods

Suction is created using heat, mechanical devices by way of hand or electrical pumps, or oil and suction cups.

The simplest method to apply cupping is when massage oils are applied to improve movement of the glass cups along the skin. The suction in the cups causes the skin and superficial muscle layer to be lightly drawn into

the cup. Once the suction has occurred, the cups can be gently moved across the skin (often referred to as "gliding cupping").

There are several more ways that a practitioner can create the suction in the cups. One method involves swabbing rubbing alcohol onto the bottom of the cup, then lighting it and putting the cup immediately against the skin.

Suction can also be created by placing an inverted cup over a small flame, or by using an alcohol-soaked cotton pad over an insulating material (like leather) to protect the skin, then lighting the pad and placing an empty cup over the flame to extinguish it. Flames are never used near the skin and are not lit throughout the process of cupping, but rather are a means to create the heat that causes the suction within the small cups.

The color and pattern of the marks depend on the level of stagnation in the area, and range from a bright red to dark purple, usually lasting 3 days to a week - sometimes longer if the person is very sick or sedentary.