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Research Article

**STANDARDIZATION OF CUPPING THERAPY POINTS AND  
MECHANISM OF ACTION IN THE LIGHT OF SCIENCE****Dr. Izharul Hasan**

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**Abstract:**

*Now a day's cupping therapy is an established therapeutic modality among Indian system of medicine as well as worldwide. In spite of that, standard operative procedure (SOPs) for cupping therapy is yet to develop. In this paper author comprises the possible indications of cupping therapy along with procedures, application points, safety concerns, historical perspective, surgical operative standards described in traditional system of medicine as well as in the light of science. Cupping may be done either wet or dry. Dry cupping is simply placing the suction cups on the skin. Wet cupping, or Scarification and Cupping, is a form of bloodletting that involves first making an incision on the skin, then applying the suction cups to suck out small amounts of blood.*

**Keywords:** *Cupping therapy, SOPs, Traditional system of medicine*

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Traditionally, Cupping Therapy has been practiced in most cultures in one form or another. The Arabic name for Cupping Therapy is *Al-Hijamah* which means to reduce in size i.e. to return the body back to its natural state. The practice of *Al-Hijamah* has been part of Middle-Eastern cultural practice for thousands of years with citations dating back to the time of Hippocrates (400 BC). Of the western world, the first to embrace Cupping Therapy were the ancient Egyptians, and the oldest recorded medical textbook, Ebers Papyrus, written in approximately 1550 BC in Egypt mentions cupping [1-6].

The use of cupping therapy is documented in the history of most great cultures and civilisations of the past with the earliest available records revealing extensive use by the ancient Egyptians, Chinese and Middle Eastern cultures. In the west, cupping therapy was part of the basic repertoire of clinical skills a doctor would be expected to understand and practice until the latter part of the 19th century. In parts of Western Europe there has been a recent upsurge in the interest from both public and academic perspectives. Scientific studies have began researching the effects of cupping therapy in an attempt to better understand the mechanisms underpinning this fascinating medical treatment that has truly withstood the test of time. Celebrity endorsements by professional sports players, celebrities, and senior international politicians [7-10].

Nowadays, Health practitioners of many modalities like massage therapists, acupuncturists, physiotherapists, nurses, and doctors are using cupping to assist them in providing more effective methods for healing and recovery [11].

The main emphasis of this study to classify cupping therapy along with procedures, application points, safety concerns, historical perspective, and surgical operative standards described in traditional system of medicine as well as in the light of science. Future perspective of this study it will guide researchers stay better organized, further help them to differentiate and compare various types of cupping, enhance their knowledge of cupping therapy, integrate all cupping methods in research and provide better quality cupping services in health care departments.

**METHODOLOGY:**

Author has searched the ancient and recent Unani literature, traditional books and thesis. Scientific databases like Google search, Google scholar and Web of Science were used and the keywords used for the literature search were cupping therapy, *al-hijamah*, wet cupping. Author collected the data by above methods and summarized the current scientific information about the cupping procedure.

**DISCUSSION:**

Based on the application of cups, cupping therapies are classified and described as in Fig. 1.

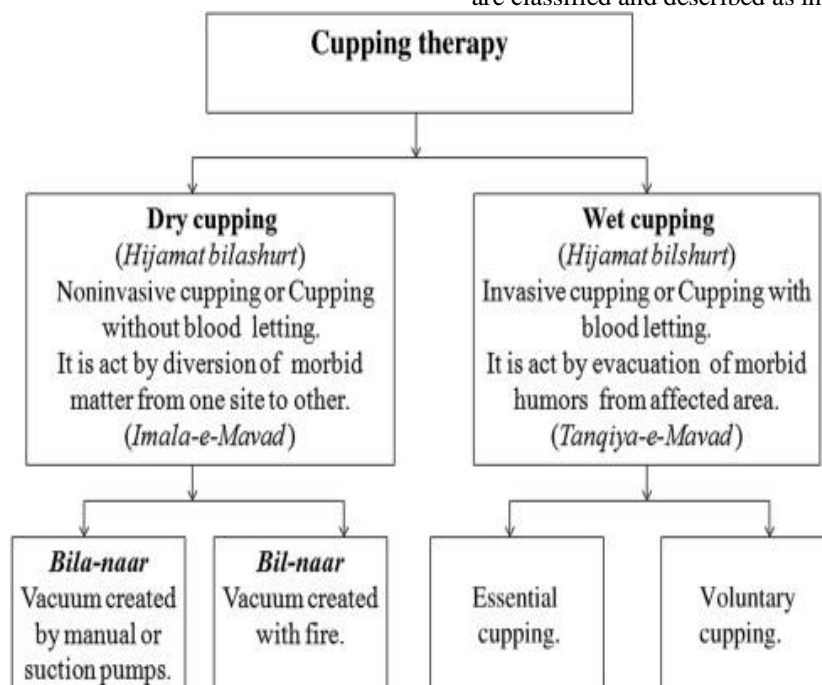


Fig. 1: Classification of cupping therapies [12]

### Cupping therapy methods

In total there are 11 methods of cupping designed to help the practitioner choose the most appropriate cupping method for the patient [6]. These methods are:

- Weak (light) cupping
- Medium cupping
- Strong cupping
- Moving cupping
- Light moving cupping
- Needle cupping
- Moxa (hot needle) cupping
- Empty (flash) cupping
- Full (bleeding/wet) cupping
- Herbal cupping
- Water cupping

#### Weak (light) Cupping

It is employed when blood and energy are sluggish or stagnant. The intention is move the stagnation and at the same time tonifies the weak energy. The key factor in deciding when to apply weak cupping is the present energetic state of the patient. Evaluation of the pulse and tongue should all point to weakness.

The amount of flesh drawn into the cup should be minimal and hardly raised. This method can be applied to almost anywhere on the body and may cause a slight reddening of the skin. Weak cupping is the gentlest method of all cupping and is particularly suitable for debilitated adults, elderly patients and young children, especially those under 7 years of age.

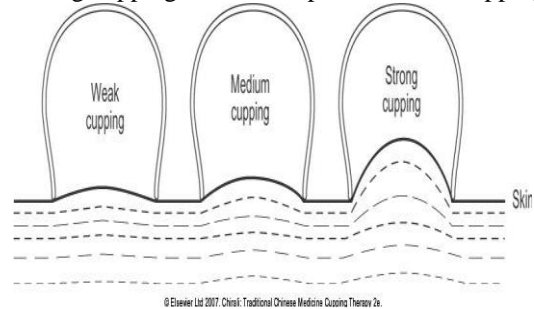
#### Medium cupping

This is the most frequently used method on patients. This method can safely be administered to children over 7 years of age. With medium cupping, suction is firmer pulling the skin well into the cup creating a slight redness. Medium cupping can safely be applied anywhere on the body.

#### Strong cupping

This is one of the most draining techniques. Therefore before deciding on this method, the practitioner must ensure the suitability of the patient. Pulse and tongue diagnosis should emphasize excess or fullness. This method may sometimes leave the patient feeling tired or drained. A strong vacuum need to be produced, giving a strong pulling sensation of the skin inside the cup. Because of the strong nature of the pulling action, the skin will quickly turn red and shortly turn purple inside the cup and possible erythema in the skin surrounding the cup. When using the strong cupping method for the first time, the mark is inevitable and can take 15-20 days to disappear completely. The cupping time should be short i.e. 5-10 minutes during the first session which can increase up to 20 minutes during later applications.

Strong cupping is often coupled with wet cupping.



#### Moving cupping

The objective of this treatment is to apply strong cupping to a much larger area of the body by the Moving/sliding action of the cup.

#### Light moving cupping

Light moving cupping is practiced mainly on patients with relatively full/excessive energy. It is useful and considered the only safe method in the management of lymphatic drainage as well as being the exclusive cupping method in the management of cellulite complaints. During the application, slight pinkish cupping marks appear on the skin, normally following the direction and movement of the cup. At no time should deep, dark red cupping marks be seen. All cupping marks should fade away in a day or two. The whole objective of light cupping is to disperse stasis or stagnation without draining the patient. All moving cupping should require special attention particularly when the skin surface is broken, e.g. scratches, cuts, bruises, open wounds, etc. Avoid cupping over skin moles.

#### Needle cupping and Moxa (hot needle) cupping

Not often practiced in Tibb as it follows acupuncture treatment. The cup is placed over the inserted acupuncture needle.

#### Empty (flash) cupping

Empty cupping is also called flash cupping for its speed during application. This is actually medium to strong cupping applied rapidly i.e. the cups remain in place for a very short period (<30 seconds). It is used to stimulate and move blood and energy in the weak and frail. The short duration is enough to stimulate physis and move blood but not enough to drain the patient. This can be repeated for between 5-10 minutes.

#### Full (bleeding/wet) cupping

This is the most favored and practiced method by practitioners. It is used in the treatment of a sudden increase in blood pressure, high fevers, blood stasis and in discharging pus from boils. This method is often combined with strong cupping. After the initial strong cupping, the cup is removed and slight superficial lacerations are made. The cup is then placed back on the site. Most of the blood in the cup

will be semi-coagulated and therefore still quite fluid. Before removing the cup, the practitioner should wear disposable surgical gloves on both hands. Remove the cups gentle. It is not recommended to bleed the patient more than once a month and not to draw more than 100ml of blood at any one time.

#### Herbal cupping

For this method one requires a few bamboo cups, a relatively deep pan, water, metal clamps, some form of fire and herbs based in a prescription based on the treatment. The cups are boiled in the pan with water and the prescribed herbs. The cups are then placed on the patient in the traditional way using (Flame). The herbs are absorbed into the bamboo cups, which in turn transfer their healing properties to the patient. Cups can be left on for 10-20 minutes.

#### Water cupping

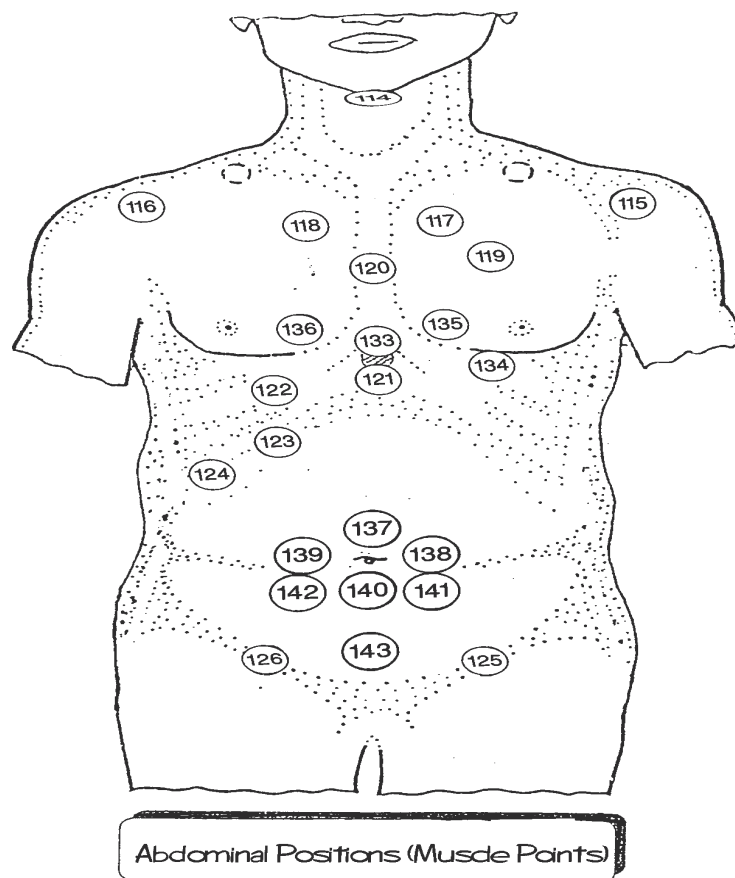
This is one of the least used and practiced cupping methods. The technique involves filling a glass or bamboo cup one-third full with warm water and employing the cupping process quickly. Hold the cup close to the patient with one hand, bring it close to the point to be cupped and insert the burning cotton

wool, swiftly and simultaneously turning the cup onto the skin.

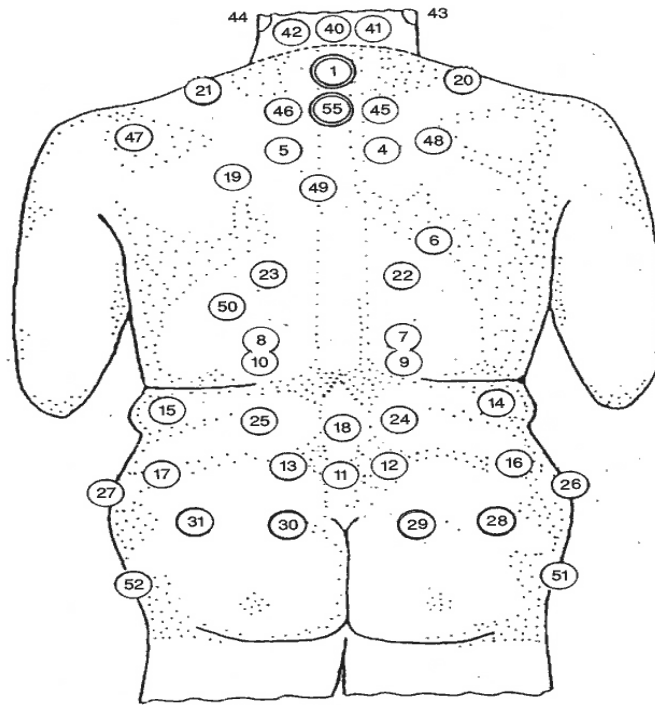


This method is said to disperse energy and resolve phlegm making it very beneficial for asthma, particularly in children. There is usually no mark left with this method.

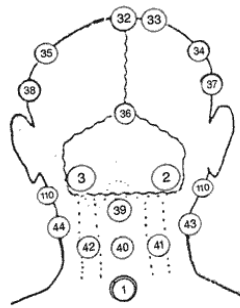
**Cupping therapy points according to disease wise**



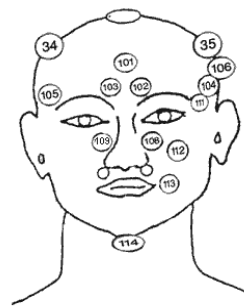
Abdominal Positions (Muscle Points)



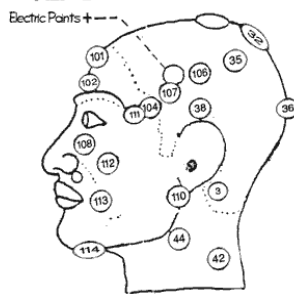
Back Positions (Muscle Points)



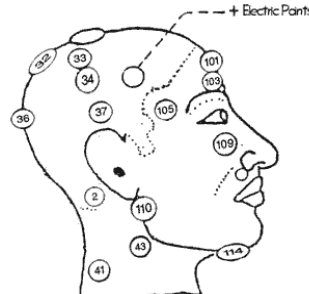
Back



Face

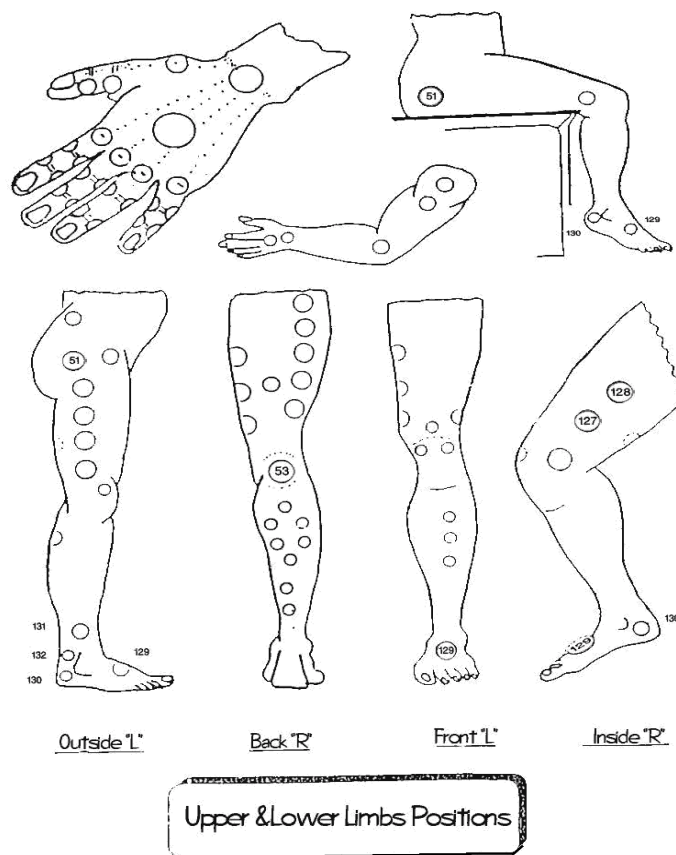


Left Side



Right Side

Head Positions

**Group (A) [6]**

**Rheumatism (painful joints)** (points 1, 55, in addition to all areas of pain).

- **Roughness of knee** (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13 and cupping around the knee and you may add 53, 54).
- **Oedema (swollen tissue due to build up of fluid)** (points 1, 55, 130, the right and left side of the heel and you may add 9, 10).
- **Sciatic pain (nerve pain from the buttock which goes down the leg)** (for the right leg) (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 26, 51 and places of pain on the leg especially the beginning and the end of the muscle) (for the left leg) (points 1, 55, 11, 13, 27, 52 and places of pain on the leg especially the beginning and the end of the muscle).
- **Back pain** (positions 1, 55 and cupping on both sides of the spine and places of pain).
- **Neck/shoulder pain** (points 1, 55, 40, 20, 21 and places of pain).
- **Gout (swollen joints due to excess uric acid)** (points 1, 55, 28, 29, 30, 31, 121 and places of pain).
- **Rheumatoid Arthritis** (points 1, 55, 120, 49, 36 and all large and small joints).

- **Paralysis of one half of the body (Hemiplegia)** (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13, 34 or 35 and all the injured joints, massage daily).
- **Paralysis of all four limbs (Quadriplegia)** (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13, 34, 35, 36 and all body joints and daily massage).
- **Immune system deficiency** (points 1, 55, 120, 49).
- **Muscle spasm** several dry cupping around the affected muscle.
- **Poor blood circulation** (points 1, 55, 11 and ten cups on both sides of the spine from the top to the bottom in addition to taking a teaspoon of pure organic, raw, apple cider vinegar and honey every other day).
- **Tingling arms** (points 1, 55, 40, 20, 21, arm muscles and affected joints).
- **Tingling feet** (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13, 26, 27, feet joints and affected muscles).
- **Abdominal pain** (points 1, 55, 7, 8 and dry cupping on 137, 138, 139, 140, as well as dry cupping on the back opposite to the pain).

(Dry Cupping means without any incisions/scratches).

**Group (B) [6]**

**Important Note:** The following points are arranged according to their importance. Sometimes, the cupping therapist does not need to use all of the points and sometimes he/she has to use them all, depending on the condition of the disease.

- **Hemorrhoids (swollen vessels around anus)** (points 1, 55, 121, 11, 6 and dry cupping on 137, 138, 139).
- **Anal Fistula (opening in skin near anus, due to formation of a channel through which fluid leaks)** (points 1, 55, 6, 11, 12, 13 and cupping around the anus and above the fistula hole).
- **Prostate and Erectile dysfunction, ED (male impotence and urinary difficulty due to enlarged prostate gland)** (points 1, 55, 6, 11, 12, 13) and you may add for ED 125, 126, 131 on both legs, and dry cupping on 140, 143).
- **Chronic coughs and lung diseases** (points 1, 55, 4, 5, 120, 49, 115, 116, 9, 10, 117, 118, 135, 136, and two cups below both knees).
- **Hypertension (high blood pressure)** (points 1, 55, 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 101, 32, 6, 48, 9, 10, 7, 8, and you may replace 2, 3 with 43, 44).
- **Stomach problems and ulcers** (points 1, 55, 7, 8, 50, 41, 42 and dry cupping on 137, 138, 139, 140).
- **Renal (kidney) disease** (points 1, 55, 9, 10, 41, 42 and dry cupping on 137, 140).
- **Irritable bowel syndrome (abdominal cramps and discomfort characterized by bloating and trapped wind and alternating bouts of diarrhea and constipation, often related to anxiety)** (points 1, 55, 6, 48, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 45, 46 and dry cupping on 137).
- **Chronic constipation (long term difficulty with opening bowels)** (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13, 28, 29, 30, 31).
- **Diarrhea** (dry cupping on 137, 138, 139, 140).
- **Involuntary urination (bed wetting)** (after the age of five: dry cupping on 137, 138, 139, 140, 142, 143, 125, 126).
- **Depression, withdrawal, insomnia (inability to sleep), psychological conditions and nervousness** (points 1, 55, 6, 11, 32 and below the knees).
- **Angiospasm and Arteriosclerosis (narrowing of the blood vessels due to muscular spasm or fatty deposits)** (points

1, 55, 11) (cupping points are on the places of pain in addition to a teaspoon of pure, organic, raw, apple cider vinegar and honey every other day).

- **Inflammation in the lining of the stomach (gastritis)** (points 1, 55, 121).
- **Excessive sleep** (points 1, 55, 36) in addition to a teaspoon of pure, organic, raw, apple cider vinegar and honey every other day).
- **Food allergies** (one dry cup using a light suction directly on the umbilicus pit [belly button]).
- **Sores, leg and thigh abscesses (pus filled spots) and itching of iliac fossae (itching in hip area)** (points 1, 55, 129, 120).

**Group (C) [6]**

**Important Note:** The following points are arranged according to their importance. Sometimes, the cupping therapist does not need to use all of the points and sometimes he/she has to use them all depending on the condition of the disease.

- **Heart disease** (points 1, 55, 19, 119, 7, 8, 46, 46, 47, 133, 134).
- **Diabetes** (points 1, 55, 6, 7, 8, 22, 23, 24, 25, 120, 49) note: the area of cupping should be applied with black seed oil or honey for 3 days.
- **Liver and gall bladder disease** (points 1, 55, 6, 48, 41, 42, 46, 51, 122, 123, 124 and 5 cups on the right, outer leg).
- **Varicose veins (enlarged, unsightly superficial veins) on the legs** (points 1, 55, 28, 29, 30, 31, 132 and around the veins but NOT over the veins).
- **Varicocele (enlarged unsightly veins on scrotum of male)** (points 1, 55, 6, 11, 12, 13, 28, 29, 30, 31, 125, 126).
- **Elephantiasis (swollen leg due to blockage of lymph channels)** note: the patient should rest for 2 days before cupping. He/She should also raise his/her affected leg up and then place it in warm water for two hours prior to cupping (points 1, 55, 11, 12, 13, 120, 49, 121 and around the affected leg from the top of the leg to the bottom in addition to 125, 126, 53, 54).
- **Skin diseases** (points 1, 55, 49, 120, 129, 6, 7, 8, 11 and cupping on the affected areas).
- **Overweight** (points 1, 55, 9, 10, 120, 49 and areas of desired weight loss), daily massage cupping over area of desired weight loss.
- **Underweight** (points 1, 55, 121).
- **Cellulite** daily massage cupping over affected area.

- **Infertility** (points 1, 55, 6, 11, 12, 13, 120, 49, 125, 126, 143, 41, 42).
- **Thyroid disease** (points 1, 55, 41, 42).

**Group (D) [6]**

- **Headaches** (points 1, 55, 2, 3) and you may replace points 2, 3 with 43, 44. If it is caused by **eye strain** add 104, 105 and 36. If it is caused by **nasal sinuses** add 102, 103 and 114. If it is caused by **high blood pressure** add 11, 101 and 32. If it is caused by **constipation** add 28, 29, 30 and 31. If it is caused by **a cold** add 120, 4 and 5. If it is caused by **astomach ache** add 7, 8. If it is caused by **the kidneys** add 9, 10. If it is caused by **menstruation** for women add 11, 12 and 13. If it is caused by **gall bladder** and **liver** add 6, 48. If it is caused by the **spine column** perform cupping on the spine. If it is caused by tension add 6, 11 and 32. If it is caused by **anemia** add 120, 49 and take one teaspoon of black honey (molasses) with a quarter of a teaspoon of ground fenugreek and 7 ground black seeds daily. If the headache is due to **tumors** in the brain, cupping should be performed on the area of pain on the head).
- **Migraine (severe headache associated with nausea and visual disturbance)** (points 1, 55, 2, 3, 106 and area of pain).
- **Diseases of the eyes (retina, eye disorder, blurred vision, atrophy of the eye nerves, glaucoma (Blue Water), cataract (White Water) and weak eye, eye inflammation and secretion of tears and eye sensitivity** (points 1, 55, 36, 101, 104, 105, 9, 10, 34, 35, above the eyebrows and on the hair line above the forehead).
- **Tonsils, throat, gums, teeth, and the middle ear problems (dizziness, nausea and ringing in ears)** (points 1, 55, 20, 21, 41, 42, 120, 49, 114, 43, 44).
- **Weakness of hearing and inflammation of hearing nerve, tinnitus (ringing sensation in ears)** (points 1, 55, 20, 21, 37, 38 and behind the ear).
- **Nasal sinuses** (points 1, 55, 102, 103, 108, 109, 36, 14 and on the hair line).
- **Neuritis (inflammation) of the fifth and seventh nerves** (points 1, 55, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114 and on the affected area).
- **To stimulate the system of perception (encourage awareness)** (points 1, 55, 2, 3, 32).

- **Clinical Memory Loss** (important: if point 39 is cupped unnecessarily it may cause damage to the memory. Also its unnecessary repetition may increase memory loss (point 39 occipital prominence).
- **Mute (unable to speak)** (points 1, 55, 36, 33, 107, 114).
- **To help stop smoking** (points 1, 55, 106, 11, 32).
- **Convulsion (fits)** (points 1, 55, 101, 36, 32, 107 on both sides, 114, 11, 12, 13).
- **For the treatment of mental retardation** (points 1, 55, (101 only once) 36, 32, 2, 3, 120, 49, 11, 12, 13).
- **Atrophy (loss) of brain cells (oxygen deficiency)** (points 1, 55, 101, 36, 32, 34, 35, 11 and perform cupping on the joints, muscles and neck, 43 and 44 on the front and back. Eat honey and royal jelly. Perform massage cupping daily).

**Group (E) [6]****Gynecological**

**Important warning:** pregnant women should avoid cupping during pregnancy except if they are over-due and wish to go into labour. In this case, they should have dry and massage cupping between the knee and ankle on both legs. Cupping a pregnant woman may cause miscarriage.

- **Hemorrhage (vaginal bleeding)** (points 1, 55, (3 dry cups under each breast daily until bleeding ceases).
- **Amenorrhea (absence of periods)** (points 1, 55, 129, (131 from the outside), 135, 136).
- **Brownish Secretion** 3 dry cups under each breast daily until secretion ceases (points 1, 55, 120, 49, 11, 12, 13 and 143). If secretion has no smell, no colour or itching, perform cupping on (points 1, 55, 9, 10, 41, 42, 11, 12, 13, 143).
- **Menstruation (period) problems** (points 1, 55 (dry cupping on 125, 126, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143).
- **To stimulate the ovaries** (points 1, 55, 11, (dry cupping on 125, 126).
- **Pain after a uterus (womb) operation, menstrual (period) pain, the problems of ligation of the fallopian tube (tube being tied/blocked), milk existence in the breast without being pregnant and menopausal symptoms (depression, nervousness, psychological conditions, acute uterus)** (points 1, 55, 6, 48, 11, 12, 13, 120, 49) (Dry Cupping on



125, 126). To regulate the menses, it is preferred to perform cupping on the second day of the menses.

#### **Cupping Places on Back [6]**

- 1**, the shoulder, the seventh vertebra (bone of spine) of the neck.  
**2 & 3**, the area between the ears, the back of the head where hair grows or on the sides of the neck.  
**4 & 5**, the air door between the two ribs upwards in the branching of the tracheae (main windpipe) and the bronchus (smaller windpipe).  
**6**, the gall bladder at the peripheral of the right rib toward the spine.  
**7 & 8**, on the stomach place at the middle of the back opposite to the stomach on the spinal sides.  
**9 & 10**, the kidney centre under **7 & 8** on the middle of the back.  
**11**, lumbar vertebrae – a prominent bone at the lower back of the vertebra column.  
**12 & 13**, on the sides of **11**, slightly upward, 5cm away from the spine.  
**14, 15, 16 & 17**, the colon, almost on the colon corners from the back and **18** of the middle of the spine.  
**19**, the heart, opposite to the heart from the back and almost on the left rib side.  
**20 & 21**, tonsils triangle that lies in the area between the neck and the shoulder with a slight bending to the back.  
**22 & 23**, above the pancreas gland under the rib end.  
**24 & 25**, at the beginning of the lower half of the back.  
**26 & 27**, bilaterally at the sides of the iliac bone.  
**28, 29, 30 & 31**, at the upper part of the buttocks.  
**32**, on the middle of the head.  
**33**, on the right part of the hair near the forehead or the hair line.  
**34 & 35**, the right and left part of the brain (at the temporal sides of the brain) as well as the occipital bone.  
**36**, the cerebellum (occipital) prominent bone on the head.  
**37 & 38**, nearly 3cm above the ears.  
**39**, prominent occipital bone, the deep area at the back of the head where cupping is prohibited, except in necessary cases.  
**40**, in the middle of the back of the neck.  
**41 & 42**, on the back of the head to the right and the left.  
**43 & 44**, the sides of the neck.  
**45 & 46**, nearly 3cm above the air trachea (**4-5**).  
**47**, on the left shoulder in addition to the heart.  
**48**, on the right rib from upward, complementary to the gall bladder knot.

**49**, the immunity area from the back, between the two scapulae (shoulder blades).

**50**, 6cm slightly above **8**, for stomach ulcers.

**51 & 52**, the two thigh bones (femur), from both sides.

**53 & 54**, the inner part of the knee from the back.

**55**, almost 3cm under the shoulder.

#### **Cupping places on the face and abdomen**

**101**, the forehead on the place of worship in praying and it is better not to repeat it.

**102 & 103**, above the eyebrows from the inner part of the nasal sinuses.

**104 & 105**, on both sides of the brows and slightly upward for headaches and sight.

**106**, almost 6cm above the left ear to help give up smoking.

**107**, nearly 4cm above the cheeks to assist in speech.

**108 & 109**, on the sides of the nose for nasal sinuses.

**110**, under the ear from the right and left.

**111, 112 & 113**, near the eye and the cheek and near the lip to treat the fifth and sixth nerve.

**114**, under the chin and it has many benefits.

**115 & 116**, under the ends of the clavicle (collar bone) from the outside and on the shoulders.

**117 & 118**, under the clavicle (collar bone) from the inside, on the chest.

**119**, the heart, under the middle of the left clavicle (collar bone) using four fingers of the patient himself.

**120**, sternum bone (breastplate), in the middle of the chest.

**121**, first parts of the stomach directly under the chest bone.

**122, 123 & 124**, above the liver, right of the belly.

**125 & 126**, between the belly and the thigh near the pubic hair area for involuntary urination, infertility...etc.

**127 & 128**, on the inner part of the thighs.

**129**, on the back of the feet to the right.

**130**, on the sides of the heel from inside and outside for edema.

**131**, above the heel bone nearly 5cm from the outside.

**132**, varicocele.

**133**, almost 2cm above the stomach mouth and near the end of the chest bone.

**134**, under the left breast.

**135 & 136**, 5cm away from the breast nipple from the inside for the lungs.

**137, 138, 139 & 140**, above, right, left and under the umbilicus (belly button).

**141, & 142**, Right and left of **140**.

**143**, above the bladder.

#### **Therapeutic indications of cupping therapy [6]**

**1. Musculoskeletal and autoimmune disorders:**  
 Cupping can eliminate pain causing substances,

prostaglandins, inflammatory mediators and cytokines.

- Neck pain, cervical spondylosis
- Back pain (lumbago) and lumbar disc herniation
- Lumbar disc prolapse unless surgery is indicated
- Fibromyalgia and fibrositis
- Neck and shoulder pain, stiffness, spasm
- Skeletal pain, myalgia
- Knee osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis
- Shoulder back myofascitis
- Post fracture pain, sprain, traumatic strain
- Muscles spasm
- Tendonitis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Sciatica
- Ankylosing spondylitis
- Addisons disease
- Autoimmune anaemia

**2. Cardiovascular diseases:** Cupping eliminates excess intravascular fluids, excess lipids, vasoconstrictors and aetiology concerning substances.

- Hypertension (through removing excess serum fluids and vasoconstrictors)
- Edema (through removing excess fluids and clear interstitial spaces)
- Myocardial ischemia and arrhythmia
- Rheumatic fever
- Vascular thrombosis
- Coronary artery diseases (narrowing of the arteries)
- Abnormal heart rhythms

**3. Gynaecological disorders:**

- Amenorrhoea
- Dysmenorrhoea
- Leucorrhoea
- Infertility
- Haemorrhage (vaginal bleeding)
- To stimulate the ovaries
- Menstruation problems

**4. Haematological disorders:** Cupping clears blood from fragments of haemolysed cells, liberated Hb, excess iron

- Sideroblastic anaemia (to excrete excess iron)
- Thalassemia (to excrete excess serum iron, fragmented cells and ferritin)
- Polycythemia

**5. Dermatological disorders:** Cupping clears toxic blood from fragments of abnormally high IgE and other diseases

- Psoriasis
- Atopic dermatitis
- Acne vulgaris

- Leucoderma/vitiligo
- Cellulitis
- Idiopathic urticaria

**6. Endocrinal/metabolism disorders:** Cupping eliminates accumulated substrates and metabolites from body and induces blood clearance; induce immunity boosting and pharmacological potentiation.

- Hypothyroidism
- Hyperthyroidism
- Obesity
- Prevents diabetes mellitus complications
- Osteoporosis
- Gout and gouty arthritis
- Hyperlipidemia
- Hormonal imbalance

**7. Neuropsychiatric disorders:** Cupping removes pain causing substances, prostaglandins and aetiological concerning fluids from the body.

- Headache
- Migraine
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Obsessive compulsory disorders
- Insomnia
- Dementia
- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Laziness, lassitude and somnolence

**8. Respiratory and ENT disorders:** Cupping removes pathology concerning substances and boost immunity.

- Allergic rhinitis
- Bronchial asthma
- Tonsillitis
- Motion sickness
- Sinusitis
- Otitis media
- Bronchitis

**9. Gastrointestinal disorders:**

- Constipation
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Gastritis
- Ulcerative colitis
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Intoxication (toxins, food and drugs administration)

**10. Miscellaneous:**

- Cellulitis
- Diabetic foot (excrete abnormal, harmful metabolites, increase immunity, and improve local circulation in foot)
- Influenza, epidemic flu as cupping enhances the natural antiviral immunity
- Prevents parkinson disease progress
- Frozen shoulder
- Varicose veins
- Blockages and congestion

- Diarrhoea

### MECHANISM OF ACTION

#### According to Gao *et al*

According to Gao *et al.* putting cups on selected acupoints on the skin produces hyperemia or hemostasis and results in a therapeutic effect [13]. However, this theory unable to explain therapeutic benefits of cupping therapy in treating numerous diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis etc.

#### According to Hong *et al*

According to Hong *et al* cupping therapy works through creating specific changes in local tissue structures as a result of local negative pressure in the cups used which stretches the nerve and muscle causing an increase in blood circulation and causing autohemolysis [14].

This mechanism projected by Hong *et al* may be accepted to mention that local negative pressure may affect tissue structure and increase blood circulation but not sufficient to explain benefits of cupping therapy in treating inflammatory diseases, migraine, headache, hypertension etc. However explains mechanisms of action in few diseases to explaining therapeutic effect of cupping therapy.

#### Chinese Theory:

Chinese cupping is a form of Oriental healing and traditional Chinese medicine that is believed to be around three thousand years old, and from the first accounts, it is known to heal pulmonary tuberculosis. In relatively more recent times, it is mentioned in the documentation, A Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies, written in 300 AD by Ge Hong, a Taoist herbalist. This form of healing cup therapy is non-invasive in nature and works on the Chinese surmise that ailments are caused when the “qi” or “chi” or the life force of the body is disrupted because of some ailment or injury. Cupping therapy works to restore this equilibrium and thus heal the patient and provide pain management.

Traditional Chinese form of healing is deeply rooted in nature and man’s harmony with his surroundings. It is based on four basic beliefs.

- Humans are closely linked to their environment and all factors such as the their location on earth, month of the year and time of the day all affect their bodies. Other factors also play an important part such as age, genetic background and body type.
- The human body is a comprehensive structure that includes not just the body but also the mind, spirit, emotions and feelings that together make up a complete person. Each of these are driven by the life energy inside a person.

- The human body has the innate ability to heal itself and sometimes just needs a little stimulation in the right way.
- The human body is capable of giving the person signals about its condition and people should know how to recognize these signals and understand the signs so they can take action before they actually fall ill.

#### According to Dr Izharul Hasan [15]

##### Mobility of soft tissue [15]

Any injury or inflammation of the soft tissue leads to adhesion formation which decreases their mobility and causes pain. The to and fro movement of massage cupping mechanically breaks down the adhesion and facilitates the free movement of the adherent structure. The various conditions in which massage cupping is used for mobilization of the soft tissues are tendonitis, muscular injury, ligament sprain.

##### Muscle spasm and pain [15]

Spasm is the increased muscle tone in a localized area. In the presence of spasm there is capillary constriction which reduces the blood flow that results in limitation of flow of nutrients and oxygen to the area and retention of waster products that produces more spasm. This spasm can be broken by gliding cupping/moving cupping may the following mechanism.

- Massage cupping stimulates the sensory nerve endings and production of mild pain, massage blocks the pathways of this pain.
- The mechanical movement stretches the individual fibres of soft tissue and reduce their tension.
- Helps in the removal of metabolic waste products as these substances are noxious to the tissue and irritate the free nerve endings, this result in reduction of pain.
- All these factors together aid to reduce the spasm.

##### Enhancement of circulation [15]

Gliding Massage has been used since long time for the treatment where the blood supply is decreased due to vasoconstriction in response to cold. The rubbing action histamine like substances from mast cells thereby causing local vasodilatation and increasing circulation of the part. Gliding Massage is prescribed in nerve palsies and in various lower motor neuron lesions. This improved arterial circulation following massage stimulates the exchange of nutrients into paralyzed extremities.

##### Mobilize secretions in the lungs [15]

Gliding massage finds a major role in the treatment of those chest disorders where increased and viscid secretions are the source of problem for e.g. chronic bronchitis, emphysema, etc. there occurs increased

production of sputum, which accumulates, stagnates, dries up and block the small respiratory pathways. The various manual and mechanical respiratory techniques of gliding massage i.e. vibration, shaking, percussion, etc, produces a jarring effect on the lung tissue. The mechanical energy transmitted to the lung tissue through the chest walls, leads to the loosening up of the viscid secretion.

#### **Improve the general appearance of the skin [15]**

Gliding Massage in general improves the nutritive status of the skin. It facilitates the movement of skin over the subcutaneous structures. As a result skin becomes softer more supple and finer, furthermore, after prolonged gliding massage, the skin also becomes tough, more flexible, elastic and its sensitivity is reduced, so that it can be handled fairly, roughly without causing much discomfort. The dead cells or removed by the constant contact of the hand over the skin. The sweat glands, hair follicles and sebaceous glands, thus become free from obstruction and can function more effectively.

#### **Gliding cupping confuses the body's pain signals [15]**

Gliding cupping may interfere with pain signals pathway to brain, a process called the "gate control theory", according to experts, Pain impulses run toward the spinal cord and then up the cord and into the brain. It's only when they reach the brain that these impulses, are perceived as pain. When rub with gliding cupping, it sends other impulses along the same nerves. When all these impulses try to reach the brain through nerves, the nerves get clogged like a highway during morning rush hour. The results; Most of them won't reach the brain and if the pain signals do not reach the brain, won't feel pain. Thus gliding cupping works by 'closing the gate' that pain impulses have to pass through.

#### **Gliding Cupping also calls up the body's natural painkillers [15]**

It stimulates the release of endorphins, the morphine like substances that the body manufactures, into the brain and nervous system.

**Prostaglandin theory [15]:** Prostaglandins are products of inflammation in our body and they transmit pain signals to the brain. By doing cupping therapy we take these products out from the body and this kills the pain.

**Endorphins and enkephalin production theory [15]:** These are natural components released in our body and these components are called "endogenous pain substances," which reduce the pain and enhance the mood.

**Increasing blood circulation theory [15]:** By increasing of the blood circulation by removing the

inflammatory products and toxins out by cupping therapy which will reduce inflammation and pain

**Nitric Oxide theory:** The researchers; Ferid Murad and Robert F. Furchgott who discovered nitric oxide were awarded the noble prize of medicine in 1998. This substance is very important substance release in the body from any trauma and released also during and after cupping therapy. The functions of nitric oxide are;

- Vasodilatation, this gives more blood to the area (has 2 way vasodilatation effects)
- Muscle relaxation, which cure spasms
- Anti- thrombotic, protects the blood vessels from thrombosis
- Decrease inflammation

Prevent stenosis of blood vessels as inhibit proliferation of the blood vessels walls

#### **Safety aspects of Cupping [6,15]**

- The practitioner must wear disposable latex gloves whilst carrying out both types of cupping.
- Before cupping actually begins, the patient's blood pressure and pulse should be checked.
- The blades used for wet cupping incisions should be disposable.
- The incisions in wet cupping should be superficial, involving the epidermis only.
- The patient should be questioned on how he or she feels – any unusual sensation or fever.
- All other necessary safety measures should be in place.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Cupping diagnosis allows the practitioner to determine with the aid of suction cups whether the position of the symptoms is the true location of the disease. Additionally, we can detect which organ is defective and in need of treatment. With the many forms of cupping therapy health care provider should review the literature and make their selection of cupping method and points based on treatment studies.

After reviewing many theories and discussion, in short we conclude that wet cupping is dominated by control in (I) Neural, (II) Haematological, & (III) Immune system functioning

#### **Main effects via selecting specific application points may occur as:**

1. Irritation of the immune system by producing local simulated inflammation followed by activation of complementary system and increase level of immune products such as interferon and tumour necrotizing factors.
2. Organize of traffic of lymph and increase in the flow of lymph in the lymph vessels.
3. Effect on thymus.

4. In the neural system effects occurs by regulation of neurotransmitters and hormones like serotonin, dopamine, endorphin, acetylcholine etc.

In the haematological system, main effects occurs by these two pathways: (i) regulation of coagulation and anti-coagulation systems like decrease in the level of haematological element such as fibrinogen, (ii) decrease in the hematocrit followed by increase in the blood flow and in the end organ oxygenation.

#### CONSENT

It is not applicable.

#### ETHICAL APPROVAL

It is not applicable.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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