



Review

## Medical perspective of cupping therapy (Hijama): a review

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### Abstract

Traditional and alternative medicine practitioners have used cupping therapy for centuries. Growing data suggests that it may help treat disorders that are associated to pain in recent years. An overview of the use of cupping therapy is provided in this article. One of the most effective treatments for Ilaj bil Tadbeer is hijama. A vacuum is created to either release blood from beneath the skin's surface or merely suction the area without allowing any blood out in this unique therapeutic method, which involves positioning cup-shaped veins on the body's surface. However, the effects in certain clinical trials were really strong. It is suggested that medical professionals or researchers in order to ascertain the efficacy of hijama in the treatment of various illnesses.

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**Introduction:** Cupping therapy is a component of numerous conventional medicinal systems. In-depth descriptions of cupping therapy are found in the writings of Hippocrates [1]. Cupping involves applying cups to particular areas of the skin while applying heat or suction to create subatmospheric pressure. In AD 936-1036, Al-Zahrawi described two different kinds of cupping cups, one with a big opening and a long handle and the other with a small hole and a short grip. The first type was used to treat significant fluid buildup, the second type to treat the spread of pain [2].

**Procedure:** Cups can be used dry or wet. By placing cups on healthy skin, dry cupping simply removes from the inflamed area to the skin's surface, blood and liquid. Bloodletting is another name for wet cupping, requires making a 1.5 ml deep and 1.5 ml wide incision on the skin where the cup will be inserted. The objective is to drain the cup of superficial blood that rushes in since it is believed to be contaminated with harmful substances [3]. A vacuum is formed in the cup that is applied to the skin when a suction pump is used on it or when a heated cup is used to cup the skin and consume the air within (fire cupping) (suction cupping). A fire cupper may utilize a glass, metal, or wooden cup (bamboo). After that, cotton that has been soaked in alcohol is burned in order to heat the cups. The cup is put flat and downward on the skin once the heat creates a suction there. A suction pump is used to remove the air from the cup once it is on the skin [3]. According to the British Cupping Society, Dr. Ahmed Younis, revealed that he does wet cupping using the "3 by 3 by 3 rule." Dr. Younis employs the "3 by 3 rule" and suction pumps with plastic cups [4]. The treatment area is first cleaned. The skin is then covered with a cup, and a suction pump is used to maintain a vacuum for three minutes. Small incisions are made with a cupping lancet using the removed cup, being careful to distance them apart and line them up with the skin's contours. It is crucial to stress that there are no significant incisions. Blood on the sliced surface can be removed by repositioning a cup over it and using suction. Once time, the cup is gently released after three minutes of suction holding, and the blood is then wiped away with tissue [5]. The blood is extracted at the conclusion of each three-minute cycle and the procedure is repeated three times. The area is cleaned with an antiseptic spray or cream before a medical water-proof plaster is applied to cover the treatment area. Due to the risk of infection, patients are recommended not to wash the treatment area for at least 24 hours. The clinical sharps container is used to discard the cupping lancet as well as any other trash, including cups [6].

**Bloodletting:** The act of bloodletting involves withdrawing blood from the body. Blood is drawn from the body during the bloodletting process. Before science was developed, medical experts believed that bloodletting could be used to treat a wide range of diseases. Blood can be drawn by poking a vein, scarification, or the use of cupping glasses [7]. During routine bloodletting, a lancet is used to extract blood from an artery (arteriotomy) or a vein (venesection) 16 to 30 ounces were frequently emptied in a day. Patients bled till they were lightheaded [8]. Another method of local bloodletting is leeching, which involves applying leeches or bloodsucking worms to a patient's skin. Since it was recognized that leeches drew blood from a

specific location on the body, they were prescribed for headaches and injuries [9]. Scarification or lancing, another name for bloodletting, involved creating crisscross cuts on the skin to release blood. Wet cupping, which includes covering the cut region of skin, helped make this easier [9].

**Main sites of cupping:** Anecdotal evidence was used by skilled cupper Ibn Sina to outline the six main cupping spots and the illnesses they were used to treat in his work "Kitab Al-Qanun" [10]. It is stated that the first spot on the head is helpful for relieving headaches and other eye issues. The area between the two shoulder blades is the second location to treat asthma and dyspnea. For treating arm soreness, use the third location, near the roots of the forearm. Any digestive system problems go next, between the buttocks and the kidneys. The fifth position, with the hips flat, is suitable for conditions affecting the urinary system. The final position for any foot problems is on the calf muscle [10]. Cupping the neck and shoulder region is also helpful for treating a number of diseases. Different places are utilized to apply the cups depending on the condition. Cupping zones on the back are thought to represent the internal organs.

**Technique:** Cupping techniques that involve different types of suction include light, medium, and vigorous cupping. Both children and the elderly can use light cupping because the negative pressure used in it is gentle and mild. Medium cupping employs a stronger suction than light cupping does. This type of cupping pressure is the most prevalent [11]. Young children and the elderly shouldn't receive the firmest, strongest cupping. Then, there are seven more groups created for cupping. These seven categories vary in that: Similar to other massage techniques, moving cupping entails putting oil on the affected area and moving the cup slowly [12]. Acupuncture and cupping are both referred to as needle cupping. In this case, a cup is used to cover the needle once it has been placed. Dried mugwort leaves or moxa are heated during hot cupping either directly on the skin or with the help of a needle. In flash cupping, the cups are put on the skin and taken off almost immediately. This process is carried out repeatedly. Total cupping or wet cupping are other names for bleeding cupping [13]. In order to draw blood from the skin, it is scarified. Before suction, an herbal tincture is rubbed into the cups in the process of herbal cupping. Only half of the cup should be filled with water while doing water cupping.

**Cupping in Islam:** Al-hijamah, the Arabic word for cupping, is derived from the verb "hajm," which means "to suck". The Muslims' holy book, the Quran, instructs: "And whatsoever the messenger offers you, take it." And whatever he forbids, don't do it. [Qur'an] Muslims should imitate the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who supported and encouraged the practice of cupping, according to this verse of the Quran [14]. The Prophet (PBUH) reportedly said that "three things are necessary for healing: a gulp of honey, cupping, and branding with fire." Ibn 'Abbas recounted this (cauterizing). But I forbid my followers from branding with fire (cauterization) (Sahih Al-Bukhari). He said, "Cupping is the best treatment you can use, or it is one of the best medications you can use," or "Cupping is the finest drug you can use to treat yourself." The Prophet (PBUH) made mention of cupping in roughly 28 holy

instructions (ahadith). The most astonishing of all is the fact that the great prophet Mohammad (PBUH), who lacked education and scientific expertise, concurred with every known scientific conclusion [15]. Another passage from the teachings of the Prophet of Allah claims that cupping, which purifies the blood, lightens the back, and enhances vision, is the best kind of treatment (PBUH). Some people say they feel lighter after getting wet cupping therapy. Muslims continue to use cupping despite the fact that there may not be enough study to provide a solid scientific case for it at this time. Muslims believe that cupping has healing properties. During his lifetime, the prophet (PBUH) engaged in cupping and fervently recommended it to his followers. Cupping has been used as a kind of treatment and as a preventative strategy against illness [16]. According to the "Sunnah," Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, which are the 17th, 19th, and 21st days of the Islamic month, are the finest days for cupping (the ways of the prophet). Anas bin Malik ra asserts that the Prophet (PBUH) applied the cupping procedure to both sides of his blessed head and shoulders [17]. The seventeenth, nineteenth, and twenty-first days of the Islamic lunar month were frequently used for this treatment (May God be pleased with them). (The term "hijama" makes reference to Tirmidhi)

**Hijama classifications in unani medicine:** The two main categories of ijama have been distinguished based on scarification.

Cupping with scarification or wet cupping

Dry cupping or scarification-free cupping

In his book, Abu-ul-qasim-al-zahrawi mentions a third type of hijab in addition to these two.

(Hydro cupping) (Hydro cupping)

The two types of "hijama bila Shart" are further separated.

Cupping with or without fire, option a

Additionally, there are two types of hijama based on circumstances.

(Mandatory)

(Optional)

Hijama bila-shart is further separated into two varieties based on how the cups move:

Hijama-i-Ghair Mutharrika

Hijama-i-Mutaharrika

**Mechanism of action in unani medicine:** In its description of its mechanism of action, the Unani system of medicine states that cupping therapy relies on the two principles listed below.

Tanqiya-i-Mawād (Evacuation of morbid matter)

Imāla-i-Mawād (Diversion of morbid matter)

According to the Imla-i-Mawd concept, hijama Bila Ar (Dry Cupping) causes the diversion of sick materials from one place to another. For example, hijama bi ar eliminates the toxic material from the affected site using the Tanqiya-i-Mawd concept. Hijama, according to Lin, gets worse as the humours in the affected joint get thicker. The skin's pores are opened, blood circulation is encouraged, the affected area is nourished with new blood, and the eliminative function is improved, making it easier to get rid of the Akhlat-i-fasida. It helps the body draw out and get rid of imbalanced traits like heat, cold, and moistness [18].

**Mechanism of Action of in Modern Medicine:** Although exact mechanism of Hijama-Bish-Shart is still unknown, numerous researchers have made an effort to explain it

using a variety of ideas, including the Pain Gate Theory, Prostaglandin Theory, Endorphin and Enkephalin Production Theory, Nitric Oxide Theory, and Angiotensin II Receptor Theory. The following is a succinct summary of each of these theories:

**Pain gate theory:** This idea proposes a route or gate through which pain signals might be transmitted from their source to When a suction cup is introduced, it produces pain that can't be communicated through the same gate or channel as true pain, obstructing it [4].

**Prostaglandin theory:** Our bodies produce prostaglandins in reaction to inflammation, and these prostaglandins are in charge of conveying pain. We remove these toxins from the body through Hijama-Bish-Shart, which lessens discomfort [19].

**Endorphins and enkephalin production theory:** Enkephalin and endorphins are two molecules that communicate with the brain. These are endogenous pleasure compounds, which our bodies naturally produce and release to reduce pain [19].

**Nitric Oxide theory:** As a result of any trauma, the body releases nitric oxide, which is also released during or right after hijama-bish-shart.

Among nitric oxide's uses are:

Vasodilation, which increases local blood flow.

Effects of two-way vasodilation

Relaxing the muscles reduces spasms.

Anti-inflammatory and prevents blood vessel stenosis.

Antithrombotic—protects the vessels from thrombosis.

**Taibah theory:** Hijama-Bish-Shart is a minimally invasive surgical excretory technique as shown in figure 1, and its outcomes are comparable to those obtained with abscess drainage and kidney glomerular filtration. Regulation of neuronal, hematological, and immune system activity dominates wet cupping [20].

**Potential health effect of cupping therapy:** Numerous health benefits of Cupping. Some are depicted in figure 2.

**Effect of cupping therapy on musculoskeletal system:** Wet cupping was found to be considerably more successful than standard care at reducing physical pain at 3-month follow-up in a randomized trial. Traditional wet cupping had a considerable positive effect on both shoulder and neck discomfort, according to a pilot study by Arslan M et al. Cupping therapy may have effects that last up to two years [21], according to Lauche R et al. Patients with chronic nonspecific neck pain experienced significant improvements in physical performance and quality of life [22]. Ferry et al. discovered that cervical spondylosis of the nerve-root type responds favorably to wet cupping therapy [23]. The effectiveness of wet cupping in the management of sciatica pain was examined by Bilal M. et al [24]. According to the authors, dry cupping significantly reduced pain and enhanced daily activities. By lowering inflammatory markers including C-reactive protein (CRP) and rheumatoid factor (RF), cupping therapy had a beneficial effect on arthritis. Wet cupping therapy can lessen the severity of sciatica symptoms and signs at the end of a study, according to Gaikwad N et al [25]. Dry cupping is effective in treating nonspecific low back pain, say Lari et al., who conducted a randomized controlled clinical investigation [26]. In a comparison study, Islam Nasiya Banu et al. compared the benefits of dry cupping and slow, gentle massage on knee osteoarthritis [27]. In

this randomized controlled clinical trial, dry cupping was found to be particularly helpful in the treatment of knee osteoarthritis.

**Effect of cupping therapy on reproductive system:** In order to determine the efficacy of dry cupping for the treatment of dysmenorrhea, Yazdanpanahi et al. Dry cupping greatly reduces the level of discomfort in dysmenorrhea, according to the authors' findings [28]. Dadmehr M et al. to evaluate the efficacy of dry cupping therapy in the treatment of uterine fibroid [29]. Reduce the size of the fibroid and symptoms associated with it, such as dysmenorrhea and heavy bleeding dry cupping therapy was found to be both safe and effective. In a pilot investigation to assess the effectiveness of dry cupping therapy for menorrhagia, Yazdanpanahi et al. came to the conclusion that it is a beneficial therapeutic alternative for reducing menstrual blood flow [28]. A pilot study was carried out by Abduljabbar H and associates to assess the effectiveness of wet cupping in treating female infertility. Wet cupping, according to the authors, can help infertile women conceive. According to a randomized controlled experiment performed by Azizkhani M. et al. to assess its effectiveness in the treatment of idiopathic menorrhagia [29], dry cupping therapy is more effective than medroxyprogesterone acetate at lessening the severity of menstrual period bleeding. To assess the effectiveness of wet cupping in the treatment of polycystic ovarian syndrome, Kouser et al. conducted a case report [19]. Wet cupping, according to the authors, normalizes the menstrual cycle without affecting hormone levels. A safe and effective treatment for oligomenorrhoea, according to Mokaberinejad R et al trial's is fennel seed infusion mixed with dry cupping therapy.

**Effect of cupping therapy on nervous system:** Wet cupping therapy was put through a randomized controlled experiment by Ersoy S. et al. to determine how well it worked for treating migraines [31]. Wet cupping therapy, according to the authors, aids migraine sufferers with discomfort and incapacity, and its effectiveness increases with regular use. Similar findings were made by Seo J et al. in their study on the potential therapeutic benefits of cupping in the treatment of migraines [32]. Dry cupping combined with an Unani medicinal formulation, according to Ali M et al., is beneficial in treating hemiplegic stroke disabilities [33].

**Effect of cupping therapy on circulatory system:** According to a study, wet cupping therapy can reduce systolic blood pressure in hypertension patients for up to 4 weeks. In order to determine the effectiveness of wet cupping in the treatment of hypertension patients, Aleyeidi NA et al. undertook a randomized controlled experiment [34]. In order to assess the effects of wet cupping therapy on fasting blood sugar, renal function indicators, and endothelial function, Husain NR et al. conducted a single arm interventional trial. Regular wet cupping therapy, according to the scientists, enhances physical health, which can enhance kidney function and avoid metabolic illnesses [35]. A randomized controlled experiment was carried out by kouser et al. to determine the impact of wet cupping therapy on the serum lipid concentrations of healthy young guys. According to the authors, LDL cholesterol reduction with wet cupping therapy may be a helpful strategy for preventing atherosclerosis [19]. A randomized controlled

experiment was conducted by Fadli et al. to determine the effectiveness of wet cupping in treating individuals with hypertension who have elevated arterial baroreflex sensitivity [36]. The authors came to the conclusion that wet cupping therapy effectively increases arterial baroreflex sensitivity with an indication of lowering blood pressure in the elderly with hypertension for up to 4 weeks after therapy.

**Side effects:** Wet cupping therapy typically employs sterile procedures, lowering the possibility of negative side effects. Bullae development, bleeding, swelling, and bruising are the earliest cupping symptoms. Fainting (vasovagal syncope) was a negative effect of wet cupping, however it only happened in younger individuals [37].

**Contraindications:** Regardless of age, not everyone should use wet cupping. There are stringent regulations and several contraindications as shown in table 1. The use of cupping should be avoided if the therapist isn't sure whether to undertake it or ask the patient's doctor for advice instead. Wet cupping should not be performed if it interferes with a patient's medical therapy [38].

**Pros and cons of cupping:** Cupping is not currently regulated due to a lack of proof. To learn how to perform wet cupping, you only need to take a weekend course. Anyone can practice it; no formal training is required. A patient might feel more confident if doctors were required to be members of an organization [39].

**Conclusion:** Hijama is one of the Ilaj bi'l tadbeer (Regimenal therapy) operations that the Unani medical system describes. It entails the removal of diseased stuff from the body utilizing cup-shaped capillaries. Hijama is effective in both preventive and therapeutic regimens, it is clear from the description above that it is crucial to maintaining normal health. The treatment of musculoskeletal, reproductive, circulatory, and nervous diseases using hijama is beneficial. We therefore suggest detailed, controlled, randomized, long-duration follow-up studies on sizable sample sizes to establish the efficacy of hijama in the management of various disorders.

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Table 1. Contraindications of Cupping Therapy

Contraindications of cupping therapy
High fever
Convulsions
Cramping
Easy bleeding
On allergic skin
Cardiovascular patients

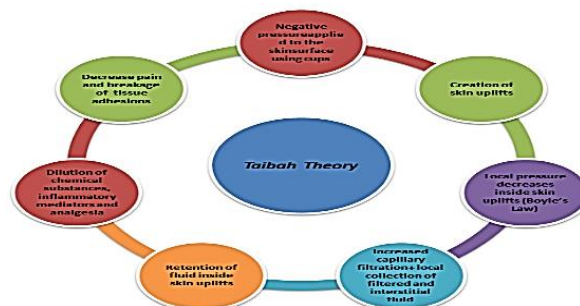


Fig. 1. Taibah theory

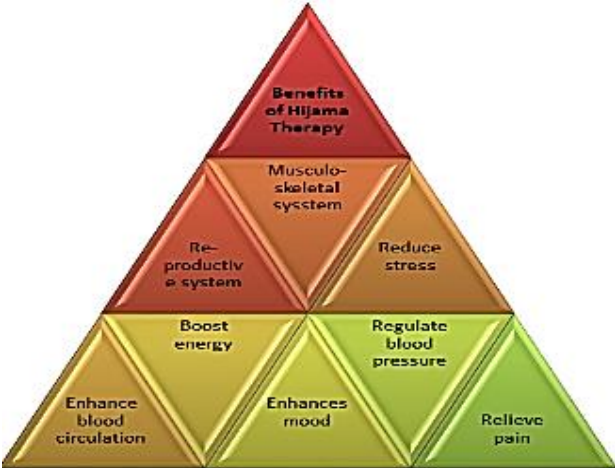


Fig. 2. Benefits of Hijama Therapy