

# PREPARING THE PATIENT FOR CUPPING TREATMENT

# 5

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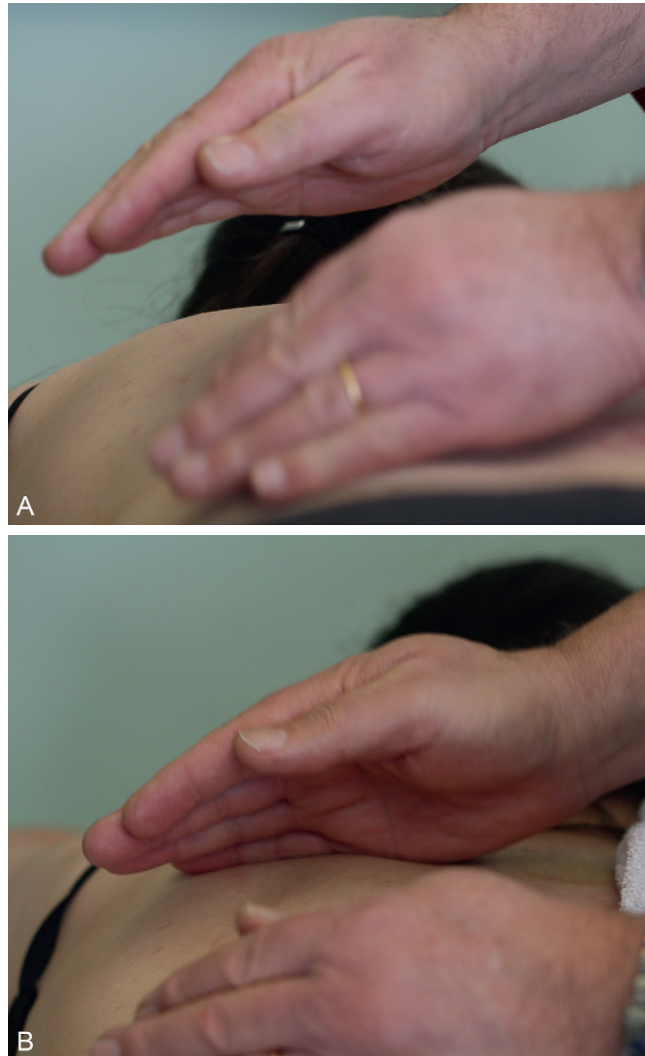
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Once the practitioner decides to perform therapy they should then proceed to prepare the patient for treatment. When I use the term ‘prepare’ I really mean just that. Do not suddenly appear in the cubicle with a set of cups in one hand and a fire in the other ready for cupping! One should perhaps explain the reason for this therapy and the benefits of cupping treatment, while enlisting the patient’s consent (and that of the parent if the patient is a child) without forcing the issue of this particular treatment. Each individual is different: old, young, men, women or children, and we all have different levels of pain tolerance. What may be tolerable and acceptable for one person could be quite painful and unacceptable for another. Enquire about the person’s pain threshold by asking and by palpating the area to be cupped. If necessary, gently massage the area to be cupped as this will help to relax the patient and also warm the cupping location. An alternative method of massaging and warming the skin is the palm/hand cupping method. With this technique the practitioner uses both his/hers palms to make a cup, then proceeds to gently palpating the skin, moving constantly over the treatment area (Fig. 5-1).

As cupping is performed on naked and exposed skin, the treatment room should be comfortably warm. *During the cupping treatment sessions all air conditioning systems should be turned off as cold air/wind is seriously contraindicated. Also keep a glass of drinking water close by as in some patients cupping may cause dehydration during the treatment.* Make absolutely sure that your patient is relaxed and not suffering from any degree of anxiety. Choose the best position to suit your patient and not you. For many people it might be a frightening experience to hold fire so close to their flesh. If necessary, show the cups to the patient and let them hold them. Apply a single cup to your own forearm and let the patient touch the cup. This will reassure and go a long way towards relaxing the person. Most people will tell you that they have indeed heard of cupping, or seen it on a television programme, but have not experienced it themselves. Explain that introducing fire into the cup will create a vacuum, and when the cup is turned on the skin it will pull the skin into the cup, and that this pulling action is the desired outcome.

Most cupping techniques have a mild and tolerable pulling action on the skin. Some, however, produce a stronger negative force and can be slightly painful – for example, strong and moving techniques. Good suction is noticeably more difficult to obtain and sustain for a longer period of time on dry and hairy skin than on oily and smooth skin. Some skins are so dry that they look and feel like tree bark: very porous and rough to touch. Fine hair covering the skin will present no problem during cupping, but a long, bushy growth, especially on a male back, may present a problem when trying to maintain good suction. Both situations require a little patience. Dry and hairy skin surfaces will prevent the cup

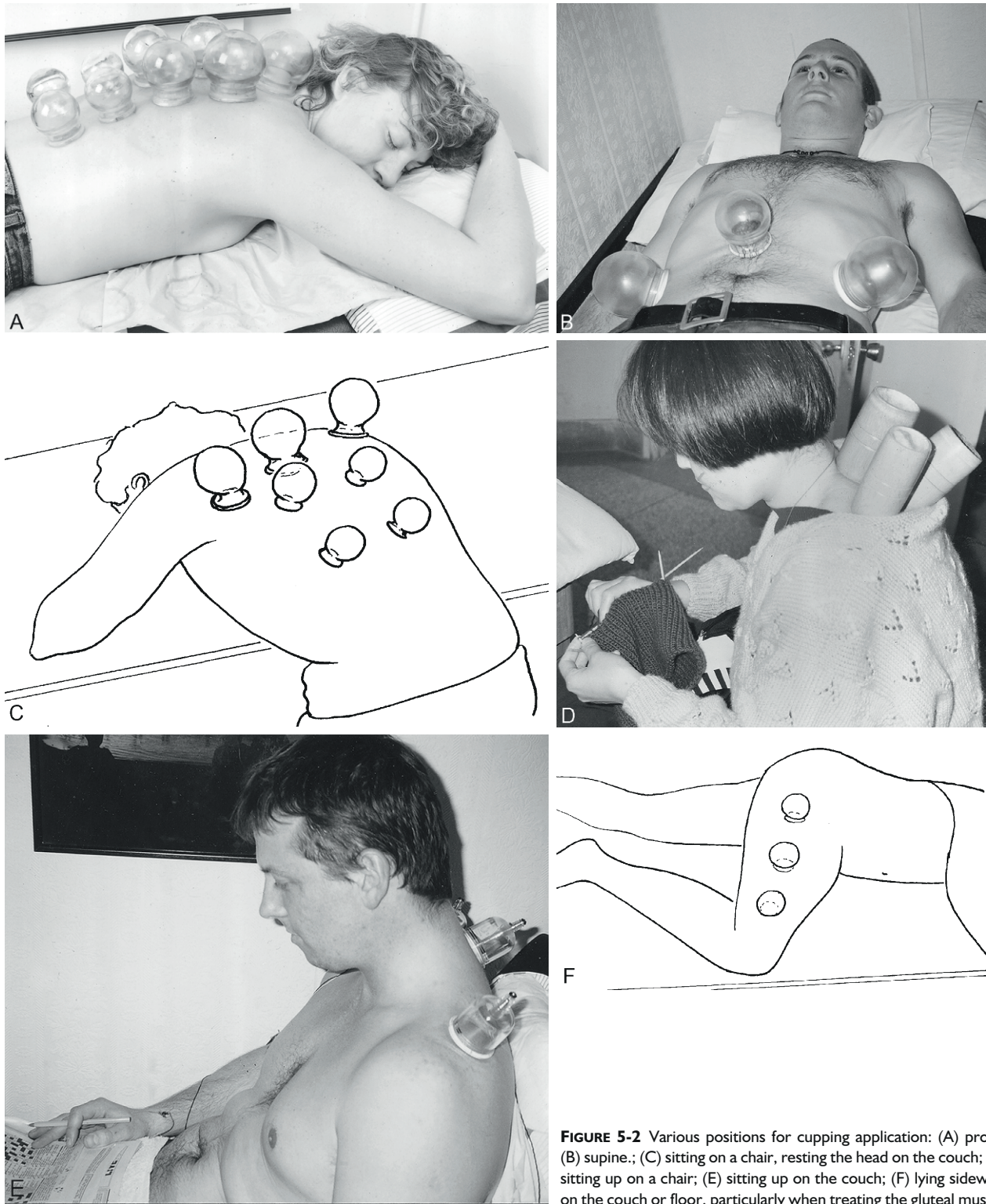


**FIGURE 5-1** (A) Palm and (B) Hand cupping technique.

making perfect contact with the flesh: the suction created is usually strong enough to draw some air into the cup, and as a result the pulling action will cease in a much shorter time and the cup will come off in less than 5 minutes or so. In order to achieve a better contact between cup and flesh, and obtain good suction, apply massage oil liberally to the area to be cupped; this usually works satisfactorily. It is equally important that you ask the patient to sit or lie still during the treatment, as sudden movements are definitely not recommended.

When treating children less than 16 years of age, always invite the parents into the cubicle with you. Here again, show the cups to the child but perhaps not the fire, as they may be a little apprehensive about the whole procedure. Maybe the pistol handle or the silicon cups will be more appropriate to use, which do not require the use of fire! When parents are present then children are quite relaxed and cooperative during the treatment.

The location to be treated is important in deciding the position of the patient (Fig. 5-2). If the cupping is to be performed on the back, the most comfortable position will be prone on the couch or the floor; if on the area of the stomach, a supine position is preferred. For the face, knees, neck and shoulders, a sitting position in a chair may be chosen. For the elderly, severe asthmatics or patients who have recently suffered from any heart condition, an upright sitting position should always be preferred.



**FIGURE 5-2** Various positions for cupping application: (A) prone; (B) supine.; (C) sitting on a chair, resting the head on the couch; (D) sitting up on a chair; (E) sitting up on the couch; (F) lying sideways on the couch or floor, particularly when treating the gluteal muscle.



## CUPPING ON THE HEAD AND NECK

When treating the points on the head and the neck, it is best to have the patient in a sitting up position on a chair while resting the hands on the couch in front (Fig. 5-3). Sometimes it might be necessary to shave the head. Applying non-flammable gel on the head might also help to obtain a good suction.

### Applications

Headache, migraine, eye conditions, ear complaints, nasal condition, neck pains, neck spasms, post stroke, paralysis, Bell's palsy, torticollis (wry neck), whiplash injury, toothache, throat complaints such as dry mouth, tonsillitis and laryngitis and during the facial rejuvenation programme.



FIGURE 5-3 (A, B) Cupping of the head and neck.



## TREATING WHILE THE PATIENT IS STANDING

Sometimes it might be necessary to treat the patient while standing up. This position is mostly used when treating leg, sciatica and back pains (Fig. 5-4).

### Application

Sciatica.

## TREATING THE JOINTS

When the area to be treated is around a joint, such as the elbow or the ankle joint, small-sized cups are more appropriate (Fig. 5-5).

### Application

Swollen joints, oedema, all Bi syndromes, arthritis, rheumatic pains and paralysis conditions.



FIGURE 5-4 Cupping while standing.

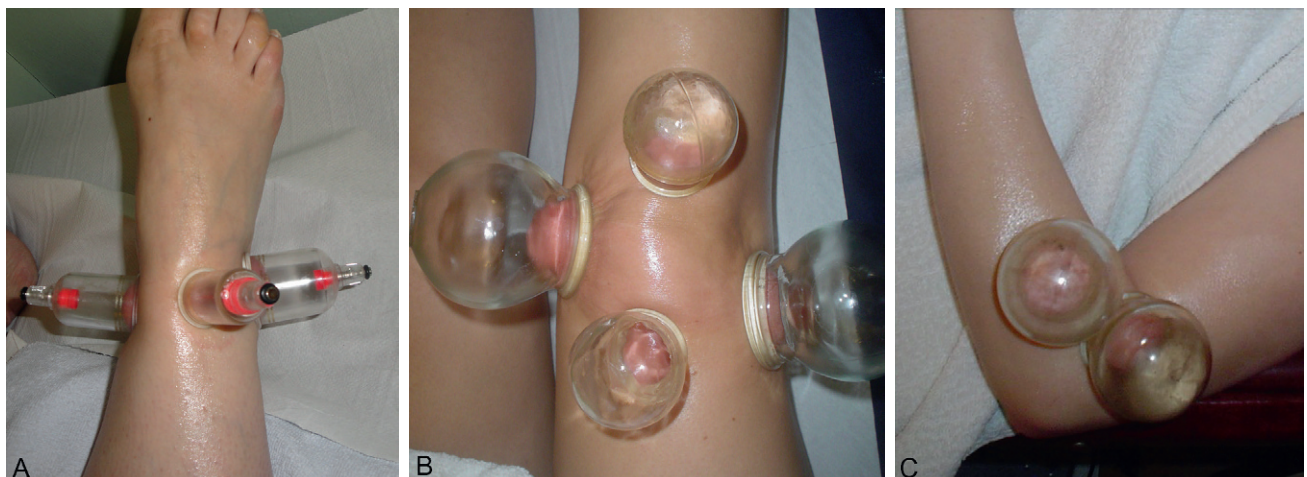


FIGURE 5-5 (A–C) Treating the joints.

## CUPPING THE FACIAL POINTS

During the facial cupping procedures, extra care is necessary as the facial skin is quite sensitive and could easily cause cupping marks on the skin to appear. In order to avoid cupping marks to the facial skin, always choose the Light cupping technique and do not keep the cup in a one position for more than 2 minutes at a time. As far as the equipment is concerned, non-fire cupping sets such as the pistol handle or the rubber and the silicon cups are more manageable while working on the facial points (Fig. 5-6).

### Application

Facial paralysis, Bell's palsy, stroke, toothache, nasal congestion, eye conditions and facial rejuvenation programme.

## CUPPING UNDER THE FEET

Treating under the feet with cupping is similar to reflexology stimulation but the pressure to the sole of the foot is the opposite direction: it is an outward negative pressure. With this cupping method the finger pressure to the sole of the foot is replaced by a negative cupping suction to the sole. *Cupping to the feet or under the feet in diabetic patients is contraindicated* (Fig. 5-7).

## CUPPING THERAPY TO THE ELDERLY PATIENT

Extreme care is needed when cupping elderly patients. As we get older our skin loses the fatty layer and becomes thinner. This can cause cupping marks and blisters to form much quicker than normal. Another common cause for the frail skin on the elderly is dehydration; somehow the elderly fail to drink enough liquid, which results in dehydrated skin. During cupping sessions on the elderly always use Light to Medium cupping methods in preference. All the strong techniques including Moving cupping are contraindicated in elderly patients (Fig. 5-8).



FIGURE 5-6 Cupping the face.



FIGURE 5-7 Cupping the feet.

## CUPPING ON THE ABDOMINAL POINTS

Cupping therapy to the abdominal points will always result in more flesh being sucked into the cup! This is quite acceptable and normal since the flesh around the abdomen is soft, loose and has no attachment to the bone structure. We can see this more clearly when cupping below and around the umbilicus points. Suction of more skin into the cup could be deceiving and can be mistaken for a Strong cupping method. Confer with your patient and make sure that the pressure inside the cup is not excessive (Fig. 5-9).

### Application

Gynaecological complaints, infertility, abdominal pain, abdominal spasm, indigestion, flatulence, constipation, diarrhoea, liver-related conditions and during a weight-loss programme.



FIGURE 5-8 (A, B) Cupping the elderly patient.



FIGURE 5-9 Cupping on the abdominal points.



# 6

## COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM) THERAPIES THAT CAN SAFELY INTRODUCE CUPPING TO THEIR TREATMENT PROTOCOL

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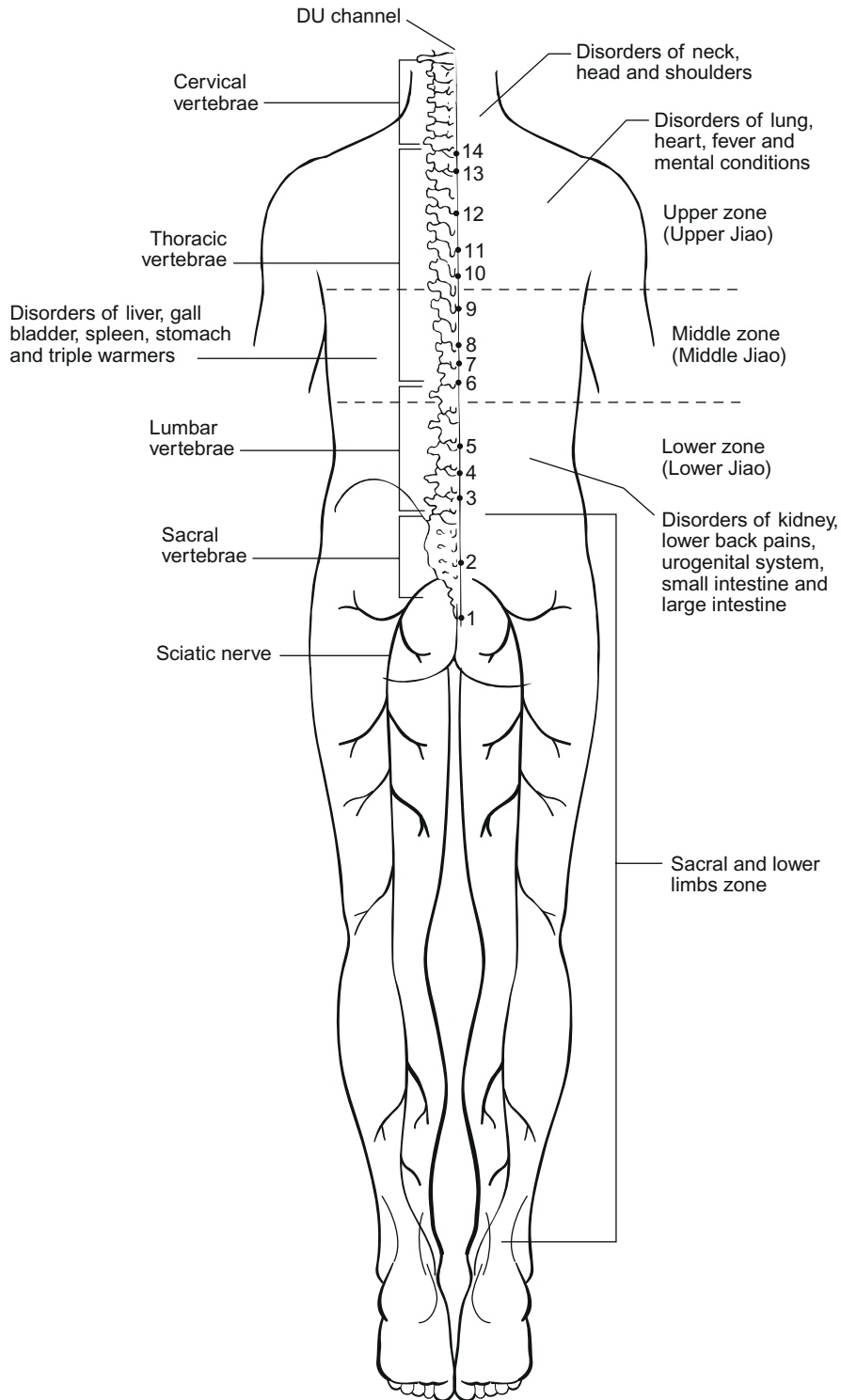
Generally speaking, most hands-on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapeutic practitioners can safely incorporate cupping therapy to their practice. The ultimate aim of all hands-on techniques is to stimulate the body's natural healing powers by balancing the physical, mental and emotional energies and restoring health to the individual. Therapies such as aromatherapy, massage, chiropractic, osteopathy, kinesiology, Alexander technique, shiatsu, reflexology, polarity and physiotherapy can all incorporate cupping therapy into their skills. For the non-Chinese-medicine-trained practitioners I have devised the 'four-zone cupping therapy map' (Fig. 6-1).

### AROMATHERAPY

This is a massage technique that matches suitable essential oils to the condition of the patient. Essential oils have been used therapeutically throughout history, therapists recognizing the therapeutic values of flowers and plants and using them regularly for treatment purposes. They have been particularly successful in the treatment of aching muscles and joints, and of stress-related conditions. It is recommended that the therapist should apply cupping therapy *before* the aromatherapy session begins. This way you move and stimulate the Qi and Blood first and finish off the treatment with the soothing action of aromatherapy.

### MASSAGE

Whenever we feel pain in any part of our body, our hand automatically goes to that part and we begin to rub, squeeze or simply massage the painful spot. This usually brings some instant relief. Massage must be the oldest and the most effective form of cure, used either therapeutically or as a preventive. Rubbing the skin increases the blood circulation and metabolism in the affected area. This action will not only directly benefit the immediate skin and muscles, but also the lymphatic system, nerves, blood vessels, cells and organs beneath the skin. A good body-worker is able to feel the tension on the skin and identify the stress zones. Once identified, different massage methods can be applied to eliminate these stress zones. Cupping directly on or next to stress zones can bring relief to sufferers.



**FIGURE 6-1** Four-zone cupping therapy map. All non-Chinese medicine-trained practitioners can refer to the map.

As a rule, treatment should begin with massage and, when the stress zones are identified, cupping should be applied for the desired time, again followed by massage and rest. Provided the practitioner keeps in mind the patient's energy level, various forms of cupping can be employed during massage therapy. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving, Light-moving and Empty methods can all be safely employed.

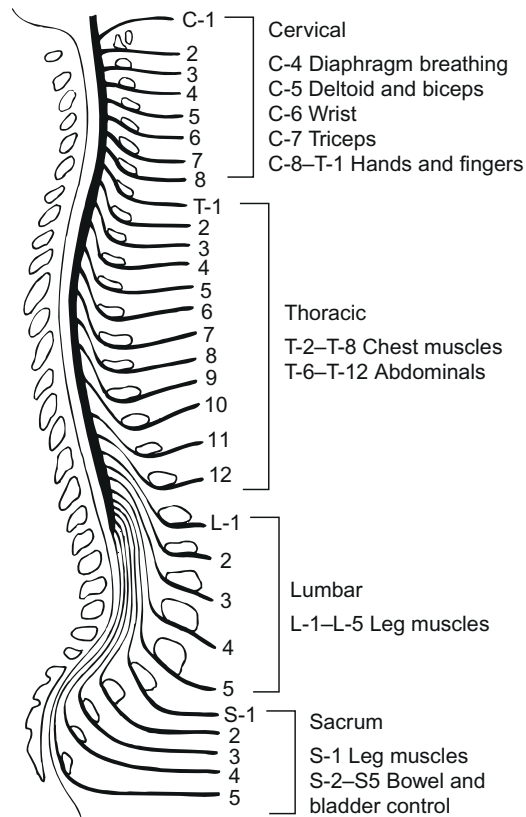


FIGURE 6-2 Vertebral column and nerve supply.

## CHIROPRACTIC

Chiropractic was developed by Daniel David Palmer in the USA in 1895. This system of treatment sees the root of the disease in the displacement of the vertebrae, which causes blockages in the energy to a particular organ (Fig. 6-2). By manipulating and adjusting the spine manually, the blockage and the pressure are relieved; this is known as 'subluxation'. Chiropractors also advise the patient on nutrition and exercise.

Cupping during chiropractic manipulation reduces the local pressure on the vertebrae and improves the flow of the Qi and encourages the blood circulation to the muscle and tendons of the spine. Cupping is used next to the subluxation and not directly over it. Also direct cupping application to the inflamed disc should be avoided.

## OSTEOPATHY

The principle of osteopathy is that disease is primarily the result of derangement of the spinal column, which consists of 24 movable vertebrae. These enclose and protect the spinal cord. When vertebrae are displaced they press on a nerve and, as a result, muscular or organ dysfunction occurs. If we think of the nervous system as an electric wiring configuration carrying uninterrupted power (energy) from site A to site B, all the expected bodily functions will occur continuously and without interruption. However, when there is a 'short' (blockage) anywhere in the system, the power (Qi/energy) will not reach the desired point and dysfunction will follow. An osteopath is trained to locate this blockage and unlock it using manipulation techniques, which may sometimes be followed by drugs or surgery. The more traditional osteopaths prefer to use manipulation as the only method. The objective is to restore the Qi/energy flow to the organs uninterrupted.



Cupping can be applied to the local and distal points on the lesion during manipulation or at the end of the session. Light, Medium, Strong and Empty cupping methods can all be employed. Avoid direct cupping therapy on the inflamed disc.

## KINESIOLOGY

Developed by Dr George Goodheart, a chiropractic practitioner, in the early 1960s, this is a system that uses muscle reflexes and their effects on corresponding organs. Weak and strong muscles are identified through a series of muscle tests. Herbal remedies, together with nutritional therapy, may also be prescribed. Shiatsu/acupressure and massage are applied to the weak muscles in order to strengthen them and the associated organs. Although this is by no means a form of relaxation massage, the patient feels light, alert and full of energy following the treatment.

Cupping can also be applied to strengthen the weak muscles and associated organs through its ability to influence the flow of Qi and Blood. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving, Light-moving and Empty cupping methods can be employed to the local muscles. Cupping should be used at the end of a kinesiologic session, followed by a massage.

## ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

This is a system of posture-correction techniques and body awareness methods and movements that help us to understand how best we can use our bodies when talking, walking, reading, singing and even during relaxation. F. Matthias Alexander, an Australian, came to the conclusion that faulty posture was responsible for a great many medical symptoms. When people habitually misuse their bodies by adopting poor postures, this will have an adverse effect on the muscular or nervous system.

Cupping therapy can assist in maintaining a strong and healthy spinal column. Apply symmetrically up to seven cups, on each side of the Bladder meridian (1.5 cun lateral on both sides of the spine), starting from BL-11 Dashu (location 1.5 cun lateral to the lower border of the spinous process of the first thoracic vertebra) and ending at BL-25 Dachangshu (location 1.5 cun lateral to the lower border of the spinous process of the fourth lumbar vertebra). The entire spinal cord is stimulated by the pulling action of cupping and the blood flow to the spinal cord will be increased, resulting in a greater energy flow and wellbeing. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving and Empty cupping methods can all be applied (Fig. 6-3).

## SHIATSU

The principle of shiatsu, or acupressure as some practitioners call it, is the same as that of acupuncture. The 14 main meridians are used as energy pathways and the classic acupuncture points are used as point of treatment. Diagnosis is performed in exactly the same way as in acupuncture: pulse, tongue, palpation, listening and observing. However, instead of using needles for the treatment as in acupuncture, finger pressure is used in shiatsu treatment (Japanese 'shi', finger, and 'atsu', pressure). This form of treatment was introduced in Japan as a healing technique, although the theory and application both stem from the same principle as acupuncture.

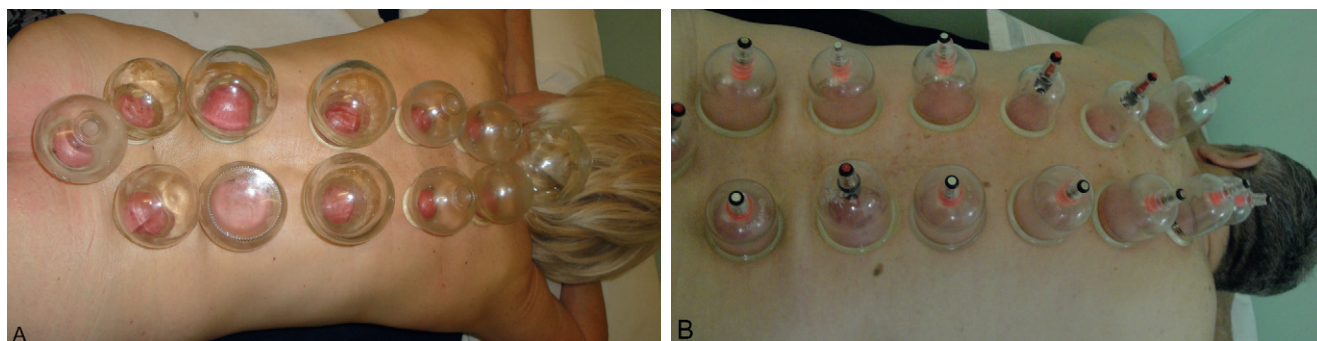


FIGURE 6-3 (A, B) Cupping during Alexander technique.



**FIGURE 6-4** Cupping under the feet.

Cupping is extensively used during shiatsu sessions, and the treatment principle should be the same as in acupuncture. The same meridians and acupuncture/acupressure points are selected during the treatment. Cupping is performed in the middle of a shiatsu session and terminated by a light massage. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving, Moxa, Empty, Herbal and Water cupping methods can be employed during shiatsu sessions.

## REFLEXOLOGY

Reflexology is another form of energy balancing therapy, focusing on the relationship between granulated points found on the soles of the feet and reflexes on the body. The reflexology practitioner, by means of a gentle touch or rub, is seeking points that are sensitive and granular. These are treated as uric acid crystallizations in the feet and are used in diagnosis and treatment. When massaging or rubbing the granules, therapeutic benefits can be expected on the corresponding organs of the body. Reflexology is based on the principle that there is a connection between the nerve endings in the feet and the organs of the body. Cupping is applied directly under the feet. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving and Empty cupping methods can all be used during a reflexology session (Fig. 6-4).

## POLARITY

Developed by Dr Randolph Stone, this system of energetic healing consists of analysing the magnetic field and its patterns of movement in the body. Massage, manipulation, mental exercises and nutritional advice are all used to eliminate energy blockages and restore harmony and wellbeing. Pressure is systematically applied on two points at the same time using both hands. For the polarity therapist, the universe and everything connected with it has two opposing sides (poles) to it, very much like Yin and Yang: day and night, male and female, inhaling and exhaling, negative and positive electrical energies.

During cupping therapy, an equal number of cups should be applied bilaterally, and the four-zone cupping therapy map should be used. Light, Medium and Strong cupping methods can all be employed.

## PHYSIOTHERAPY

This manipulative therapy is the most accepted and utilized by the medical profession all over the world, especially in the Western hemisphere. The aim is to retrain and restore the bodily functions lost as a result of operations, trauma, strokes, disease, etc., by applying mild pressure, heat, water and/or manipulation or strengthening techniques to the moving parts of the body. During physiotherapy the use of equipment is common, but nothing can substitute for the touch of the physiotherapist (the healer).

Cupping can be a great help in restoring the blood flow and improving the lymphatic circulation to the immobile or dormant parts of the body, and is especially beneficial when treating stroke patients or any other muscle-wasting disorder (Fig. 6-5). Four-zone cupping therapy can be integrated with the physiotherapy.



**FIGURE 6-5** Treating a knee injury.

**NB:** Cups should not be applied to any part of the body affected by bone fractures of any kind. Light, Medium, Strong, Moving, Light-moving and Empty cupping methods can all be employed alongside the physiotherapy.

## FOUR-ZONE CUPPING THERAPY

For non-Chinese medicine-trained practitioners I have formulated the four-zone cupping therapy map (see [Fig. 6-1](#)).

### Zone 1: The Upper Zone

- *Front aspect:* This zone includes the upper chest under the clavicles; it is mostly used to treat respiratory conditions such as asthma, emphysema, the common cold and emotional complaints.
- *Back aspect:* The cervical spine from C4 to C8 and continuing through the first thoracic vertebra (T1) to the sixth thoracic vertebra (T6).

Disorders of neck and shoulders, occipital headache, stress-related tension, deltoid and biceps pains and weaknesses, wrist pains and weaknesses, triceps and hand and finger problems, disorders of the lungs such as cough, asthma and other breathing problems, colds, chills and fever, dizziness and high blood pressure can all be treated by cupping therapy to the upper zone.

### Zone 2: The Middle Zone

- *Front aspect:* This zone is the stomach and the lower abdomen area. It is used for most gastrointestinal complaints as well as menstrual problems in women.
- *Back aspect:* This zone begins from the sixth thoracic vertebra (T6) to the 11th thoracic vertebra (T11).

Disorders of the liver, gall bladder, spleen and stomach, poor appetite, belching, hiccup, the triple burner, chest and abdominal muscles, emotional conditions such as nervous dispositions, anger and frustration, and blood disorders such as anaemia can all be treated at this zone.

### Zone 3: The Lower Zone

- This zone starts from the 11th thoracic vertebra (T11) and terminates at the fourth lumbar vertebra (L4).



Disorders of kidneys, lower back problems, bladder and other urogenital conditions, small and large intestine complaints, sexual disorders, menstrual disorders (including painful menstruation) and infertility problems (men and women) can all be treated at this zone.

#### **Zone 4: The Sacral and Lower Limbs Zone**

- This zone starts from the fourth lumbar vertebra (L4) and includes the sacrum, hips, thighs (hamstrings) and the calf muscles (gastrocnemius).

Conditions such as lumbago pains, sciatica pains, numbness and weakness of the lower extremities, paralysis and other muscular weaknesses to the lower part of the body, infertility in men and women, menstrual problems and genitalia pains can all be treated at this zone.

### **MERIDIAN/CHANNEL CUPPING**

It is also possible to apply cups directly over the traditional energy pathways (the meridians/channels). This form of cupping is predominantly administered when dealing with meridian-related Qi problems such as *blockages* or *stagnations*. Between 8 and 12 cups can be administered on the same meridian without any adverse effect to the patient. Smaller cups (number 1, 2 or 3) should be used over the bony parts (over the limbs) and larger cups (number 3, 4 or 5) on the more fleshy parts of meridians (see the meridian charts and the associated therapeutic characteristics in Figs 4-2-4-15; 'O' circle markings on the channels indicate the possible cupping locations).