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## DOES CUPPING THERAPY WORK?



You have a few aches and pains. We all have a few aches and pains.

Maybe it's a shoulder or your hips or back.

You've probably tried many things to get relief, too: chiropractic, massage, stretching, foam rolling, and corrective exercises, to name a few. Yet here you are, saddled with the same aches and pains, wondering about an unusual solution: cupping therapy.

If you've poked around on the Internet, you've probably heard good things about it from one crowd, like improved muscle recovery, immunity, vitality, and overall well-being, and bad things from another, like, well, that it doesn't do much of anything and can even be dangerous.

As you'll see, research shows that while cupping therapy may be able to provide temporary pain relief, sugar pills can do the same and it probably won't deliver any significant physiological benefits.

In short, if cupping therapy can help you, it's probably through the placebo effect and nothing else, and by the end of this article, you'll know why.

## **WHAT IS CUPPING THERAPY?**

Cupping therapy consists of placing several small cups on various points of the body and using a device to suck the air out of them, pulling the skin away from the body.

Once in place, the cups are generally left on the skin for 5 to 15 minutes, leaving bruises that can last for several days to a week or more.

There are several different kinds of cupping therapy:

- ✓ Dry cupping uses light air suction, usually with a manual or electronic air pump. This is the most common kind of cupping therapy.
- ✓ Fire cupping involves holding a flame inside the cups immediately before they're placed on the skin. As the hot air cools, it contracts, pulling the skin into the cup.

- ✓ Wet cupping, also known as “Hijama,” is an ancient form of cupping that involves making small incisions in the skin before the cups are applied, allowing blood to be drawn out and into the cups.

Now, why the hell do people do this, you might be wondering. Well, it’s usually for one of three reasons:

- ✓ To reduce muscle pain, tightness, and soreness, and to speed up post-workout recovery.
- ✓ To improve general health and well-being.
- ✓ To prevent or treat illness.

And how the hell could sucking your skin into glass cups possibly accomplish any of this?

Well, the theory is that it pulls toxins out of body through the skin, and that the fewer toxins you have floating around in your system, the better it will be able to function.

Some cupping practitioners even say that the marks left aren’t bruises but toxins that have been siphoned out of the body.

## **DOES CUPPING THERAPY WORK?**

There isn’t much research available on cupping therapy, but what has been done doesn’t leave much to write home about.

Just about every study available on cupping therapy is flawed.

They aren’t well controlled and, at best, demonstrate slight and temporary pain relief in some people with no additional benefits, and in many cases, were so poorly designed that the placebo effect couldn’t be ruled out.

Furthermore, when you dig through the literature, you’ll find just one high-quality randomized controlled trial on cupping therapy, and in it, cupping provided no relief to people suffering from low-back pain.

All of this isn't surprising, really, when you consider the dubious hypothesis of how cupping therapy even works. (Whenever someone says they have something that will help "detox" your body, you should get real skeptical, real fast.)

So, what do we have in the final analysis, then? Well, not much, it seems — a fake therapy that's as foolish as it looks.

### **IS CUPPING THERAPY SAFE?**

This depends on which kind of cupping therapy we're talking about.

Dry cupping appears to be mostly safe as long as it's performed correctly, but it can still cause severe bruising.

Fire cupping is a little more dangerous because the cups can burn the skin if they're too hot, but on the whole, it's as safe as dry cupping.

Wet cupping, on the other hand, is always dangerous because it's basically modern bloodletting, which comes with a risk of infection and permanent scarring.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE ON CUPPING THERAPY**

Cupping therapy has been around for centuries now, and has enjoyed a recent surge in popularity, mainly due to high-profile endorsements. Unfortunately, the bulk of the research currently available on it says it's quackery.

If you're looking for natural pain relief, get a massage, do some yoga, or lift weights instead — all are proven ways to reduce pain and improve health and well-being.

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