A METHOD OF HEALING IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE
COMPLICATIONS AND SIDE EFFECTS FOR CUPPING THERAPY: REVIEW

Abstract

Cupping is a Traditional Chinese Medicine therapy dating back at least 2,000 years and widely used in complementary medicine practice. Types of cupping include retained cupping, flash cupping, moving cupping, wet cupping, medicinal cupping and needling cupping. Cupping therapy is considered relatively safe. Even so, practitioners should be careful for side effects and complications. In this review; complications and side effects for cupping therapy are summarized.


Keywords: Complications, cupping therapy, side effects, Traditional Chinese Medicine

GELENEKSEL ÇİN TİBBİ'NDE BİR ŞİFA YÖNETİMİ
KUPA TERAPİSİ UYGULAMASI İLE İLİŞKİLİ YAN ETKİ VE KOMPLİKASYONLAR: DERLEME

Özet


Anahtar kelimeler: Komplikasyonlar, kupa terapisi, yan etkiler, Geleneksel Çin Tibbi
Complications and Side Effects For Cupping Therapy

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Cupping is a Traditional Chinese Medicine therapy dating back at least 2,000 years and widely used in complementary medicine practice. Types of cupping include retained cupping, flash cupping, moving cupping, wet cupping, medicinal cupping and needling cupping (1). Cupping therapy is considered relatively safe (2). Even so, practitioner should be careful for side effects and complications.

Skin Lesions

Circular areas of erythema, ecchymosis or blood blisters symmetrically distributed on the shoulders, back, thorax or lumbar area should suggest the use of this cupping therapy (3). Franco et al, reported clinical blue-red, circular erythematous spots, sometimes covered with crusts, consistent with recent cupping. Particularly in older lesions, they observed atrophic-cicatricial lesions and irregular, normal-color, slate gray or hypochromic skin surface. Lesions were observed on the back, on the presternal region and in case of pathologies causing abdominal swelling on the abdomen. It has been reported that the clinical pictures initially diagnosed as dermatophytoses or lesions caused by traumas or violence were later proved to be cupping-related outcomes or complications (4). During wet cupping sessions, instrument assisted mechanical stimulation of the body surface that intentionally creates therapeutic petechiae and ecchymosis representing extravasation of blood in the subcutis (5). Kim et al, reported of skin pigmentation resulting from persistently repeated cupping therapies performed by an unqualified practitioner in South Korea (6). Cupping therapy may lead to dermatoses that may be mistaken for abuse by people unfamiliar with the practices (7). Lin et al reported a case of cupping-related blisters as a result of changes in atmospheric pressure related to the unexpected descent of an airplane (8). Suction bullae and keloids can unusually be observed in prolonged cupping sessions (9,10).

As a summary, vacuum effect during cupping therapy should break superficial papillary capillaries and may result in circular erythema, oedema, ecchymoses, purpura, burns, keloids and factitial panniculitis.

Anemia and Other Hematologic Diseases

After almost 30 sessions of excessive cupping therapies with blood loss over two months can trigger cupping associated anemia (6). A potential risk for anemia is also defined in dry cupping (11). Cupping therapy may induce iron deficiency anemia in healthy people (12). Wet cupping is considered as both cause and cure of iron-deficiency anemia and there is no consensus in current literature (13). The history of prior blood-letting cupping therapy that
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probably had caused iron deficiency anemia were reported in 5.3% patients in Korea (14). Acquired hemophilia A was also reported associated with therapeutic cupping as complicated by severe bleeding (15).

**Burns**

Despite widespread use of cupping massage, a few burn cases have been reported in the literature (16-19). Kose et al reported a case with 10% superficial and deep partial thickness burns on his right shoulder and back as a complication of fire cupping (16). Kulahci et al, reported a case of a 32-year-old man who suffered burns on his back and shoulders as the result of fire cupping (18).

**Infections**

Wet cupping is considered to be a risk factor for hepatitis A, D and E infections in developing countries (20,21). History of wet cupping were also significantly associated with being positive for HBsAg among blood donors (22). Wet cupping is reported as a risk factor of hepatitis B antigen-positivity in the general population (23). Traditional cupping should be a minor risk factor for human T cell lymphotropic virus type I (HTLV-I) infection in endemic areas (24). Jung et al reported a 56-year-old woman with herpes simplex virus infection secondary to acupuncture and cupping (25).

**Cardiac Hypertrophy**

Sohn et al reported a case with reversible cardiac hypertrophy in severe chronic anaemia from long-term (more than 10 years) bloodletting with cupping. This was the unique report of bloodletting-induced cardiomyopathy in current literature (26).

**Neurological Complications**

Blunt et al reported a patient who developed haemorrhagic stroke after cupping therapy to the cervical area. Their hypothesis was about various manners in which cupping might induce haemorrhagic or ischemic stroke with particular reference to the relevant pathologies of the major cervical arteries (27).
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Development of Lipoma

Schumann et al reported one patient showed a formation of a lipoma in the cupping area after the first treatment session (28).

Development of Epidural Abscess

Only a few cases of epidural abscess after acupuncture have been reported. Although a rare complication, epidural abscess is a possibility when applying cupping therapy. Therapists need to be aware of human anatomy and must give continuous attention to hygiene throughout the procedure (29).

Development of Panniculitis

Masses associated with panniculitis induced by cupping are extremely rare (30,31). Moon et al, reported a 56-year-old woman presented with a 10-month history of multiple masses in the posterior neck and right shoulder areas. It has been recorded that the patient repeatedly attempted cupping therapy. After she has been diagnosed as panniculitis the lesion spontaneously resolved unless they are repeatedly stimulated (31).

Elevated D-dimer

Zhang et al reported a 46-year old non-smoking Chinese man who was found accidently elevated D-dimer during his annual health checkup. They hypothesized that the negative pressure of cupping vacuum ruptured cutaneous capillaries leading to large area of ecchymosis and bruise. The subcutaneous hemorrhage activated clotting factors which caused minute blood clots formation. Following fibrinolysis of clots led to excess production of D-dimer (2).

As a result, cupping therapy is an alternative medical procedure that has been widely performed in Asia, Africa and Islamic countries to relieve pain and other diseases. It is known that so many non-health care professionals have performed this procedure. However, there have been few reports on complications, such as skin lesions, anemia and other hematologic diseases, burns, infections, cardiac hypertrophy, neurological complications, vasovagal syncope and foreign body reactions. All complications and side effects caused with cupping
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therapy seems preventable, and therefore the first step is increasing the awareness of the public and health care professionals of the risk of these injuries.

In Turkey, patients have an increasing interest for traditional and complementary medicine. Our country needs a report system for complications and side effects of traditional and complementary medicine practices as a priority. Such complications can be saved in a central system and this results should provide valuable contributions to international literature.

Kaynaklar

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