

Empowering Patients Post-Treatment with Self-Cupping

By John Stan, DrTCM



There is a revolution underway in the manual therapy world: the incredible benefits of cupping therapy are being discovered. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the practitioner typically uses an ignited cotton ball to consume the air in a glass cup just before it is placed on the skin. The negative pressure draws the skin into the cup, where blood and fluids are brought just below the surface. This process mobilizes the tissue and promotes circulation.

Now, with the introduction of non-flame methods of cupping such as plastic cups and silicone cups, Physiotherapists and Manual therapists have experimented with and established new treatment protocols that expand traditional techniques. Examples of these include using multiple cups along a fascial plane, stationary cupping while performing an active release technique (ART), or placing a muscle in full extension and performing moving cupping along the plane of the muscle.

As you may remember, fascia has five main components: fibroblasts, collagen fibres, elastic fibres, reticular fibres, and ground substance. Each of these components contributes to the astounding features of fascia. In particular, ground substance is an amorphous gelatinous substance that, through a sugar protein, absorbs fluids like a sponge. Lack of movement or an inflammatory response triggers this protein to increase the viscosity of ground substance, leading to adhesions and stiffness. If you haven't seen it yet, check out "Strolling Under the Skin" by Dr. Jean-Claude Guimberteau on YouTube. It will inspire you and make you marvel at the seemingly miraculous nature of fascia!

A famous Traditional Chinese Medicine axiom reads as follows: "where there is pain, there is no circulation and where there is circulation, there is no pain." Movement is just one of a number of contributors to healthy circulation. When an individual is not moving or is anxious, muscle fibres contract, creating a reduced flow through the capillary beds in the contracted areas. Due to decreased blood flow, normal metabolic byproducts are not transported out of the area. Instead, they accumulate, eventually triggering a number of possible inflammatory responses. In addition, the proteins in ground substance change, making interstitial fluids more viscous which, combined with inflammation, contribute to increased pain and reduced mobility.

Previously, compressive techniques like massage, gua sha, and pressure-delivering tools have been the "go-to" interventions for musculoskeletal pain and stiffness. While providing relief, the significant game changer is the ease of creating space in the tissues via a vacuum achieved by cupping.

Cupping - or *myofascial decompression* as it is being referred to by Physiotherapists - helps to bring much-needed nutrition into tissues that have been compromised. It decreases the viscosity of fluids between fascial layers and unbinds fixated muscle layers, to name just a few major benefits.

Now, with the ease of use of silicone cups, all the benefits of cupping that we bring to our patients during treatment can be extended into home-care opportunities. With their ease of application and responsive shape, I, and other practitioners have begun instructing patients on the use of silicone cups in between sessions.

Here is a list of circumstances and corresponding size of cup that I have recommended to patients for self-care. With a bit of instruction (and a review of cautions and contraindications) self-cupping with silicone cups is becoming a home-care process that patients will immediately benefit from.

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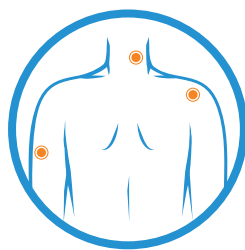
USE THE FASCIA BUDDY FAMILY OF SILICONE CUPS IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:



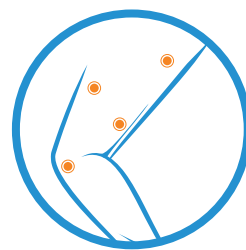
ELBOW
WRIST
HAND



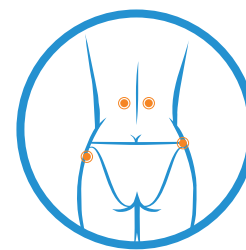
SOLE OF FOOT
ANKLE
CALF



NECK
SHOULDERS
UPPER ARMS



THIGHS
HAMSTRINGS
KNEES
IT BAND



HIPS
LOW BACK

SUGGESTIONS FOR RECOMMENDING FASCIA BUDDY TO PATIENTS

Fascia Buddy - Extra Small

- Tennis/golfer's elbow
- Wrist/carpal tunnel pain
- Dupuytren's contracture
- Carpal stiffness and pain
- Neck stiffness/tightness/pain
- Sinus congestion
- Achilles and calf tightness
- Plantar pain/tightness
- Tarsal stiffness/pain
- Medial and lateral ankle issues

Fascia Buddy - Small

- Same as the X-small cup, but on a larger body
- Medial and lateral knee issues
- Shin splints
- Calf tightness
- Upper arm and shoulder

Fascia Buddy - Medium

- Same as the X-small and small cups, but on a larger body
- Shoulder/upper arm
- Quads
- Hamstrings
- IT Band
- Hip Girdle

Fascia Buddy - Large

- Same as the X-small, small, and medium cups, but on a larger body
- IT Band
- Sacrum
- Glutes

Of course, each patient is unique, but in my experience (and in hearing feedback from other practitioners), 3 to 7 minutes once or twice a day has significantly improved patient outcomes. Additionally, I've found that after the treatment cycle is completed, patients doing daily self-cupping over tight areas have experienced fewer injuries, and increased health of fascial tissues.

In conclusion, modern cupping techniques using plastic or silicone cups, both in the clinic or at home for self-care are opening up new dimensions to healing and health. Maintaining healthy fascia is instrumental to aging well. We should all take to heart the very profound words of Lao Tsu in Chapter 76 in the *Tao De Ching*, when he stated the following:

*"We are born soft and supple, at death we become stiff and hard
Plants are tender and pliant; dead they are brittle and dry
Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death
Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of Life
The hard and stiff will be broken
The soft and supple will prevail"*

Let's all be disciples of Life and make sure we spend at least 30 minutes a day to encourage movement and stretching. Add to that daily self-cupping to help fascia stay happy!