Commonly Asked Questions About Cupping

What is cupping?
Cupping is the ancient Chinese medical technique of using suction to stimulate nerve endings, increase circulation, pull blood to the surface, and release muscular and fascial tension. The tools and the methods used to apply the cupping technique vary by practitioner and vary by what is considered appropriate for the patient.

How does cupping heal the body?
Applied correctly, cupping stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, relaxing the body and triggering the immune system to generate a healing response (namely through the extravasation of white blood cells from the capillaries and the proliferation of endogenous anti-inflammatory substances such as cytokines); this response helps clear toxins and prevent illness by moving blood and lymphatic fluid, bringing nutrients to the surface, regenerating tissue, and hydrating muscle fascia. Proper cellular communication occurs when blood and lymphatic fluid move freely without obstruction. When there is obstruction, cellular communication breaks down, disease sets in, and eventually manifests in the form of symptoms. Because the body is a system of interrelated parts requiring cellular communication to function, removing obstruction by cupping one area can stimulate downstream healing effects to the entire body.

How is cupping used in treatment?
Cupping can be used to relieve musculoskeletal pain and tension, nerve and fascial entrapment, and fascial adhesions—improving circulation to the area, promoting relaxation of the nervous system, and generating downstream healing effects. Cupping is often used as an adjunct therapy to acupuncture to reduce needle sensitivity prior to treatment and to aid in diagnostic clarity.

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What can I expect to feel during cupping?

Depending on the technique applied by your practitioner, you will feel varying degrees of pressure and movement. Most often the sensation is enjoyable, relaxing, and likened to that of a deep tissue massage.

When should I expect after cupping?

You should expect to feel a sense of general relaxation often accompanied by increased mobility and flexibility in the areas treated. Results may set in immediately or gradually up to 72hrs after treatment. Because cupping stimulates a healing response through capillary extravasation and the loosening of fibrous tension, soreness, redness, bruising, and petechiae (tiny dark round spots) are likely to occur; do not be alarmed, this is evidence of the body's healing response. Soreness should dissipate within 24-72hrs. Areas of discoloration may be present for approximately 48hrs to 2 weeks.

Cautions and considerations:

- Keep area covered from exposure to wind and extreme temperatures for at least 24 hrs.
- Drink plenty of water following the treatment to aid in detoxification.
- Plan ahead: if you do not want temporary bruising or marks present for any reason (e.g., planned events, weddings, etc.) consider the timing of your appointment.
- Wait for areas of discoloration to heal before cupping the same location.