

## An Updated Review of Efficacy of Cupping Therapy in Gynecological Disorders

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**Abstract:** Cupping therapy is considered as one of the oldest regimen in Unani medicine that was used for many years all over the world. It is a simple, safe, natural treatment with a promising effect for many diseases. This therapy is a great alternative to modern medicine where treatment for many diseases is unavailable. Cupping therapy is a simple procedure in which negative pressure is applied to the skin through sucking cups. Methodologies used for cupping therapy differ according to the type of cupping therapy e.g. dry cupping method differs from wet cupping method. The way cupping therapy is presented to medical practitioners is not scientific and does not explain scientific mechanisms underlying cupping therapy. The aim of this review paper is to provide evidence based analysis to indications, benefits and effects of cupping in treating many diseases particularly gynecological disorders which will be mentioned in this article. Moreover, this review article is focused to discuss how cupping therapy works from the scientific and medical point of view, how and why cupping is considered as a natural method of detoxifying the body with scientific interpretation.

**Keywords:** Unani Medicine, Cupping Therapy, Gynecological Disorders, Scientific Studies.

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### I. Introduction

Cupping therapy is an ancient, holistic, preventative and curative treatment which is beneficial for everyone with any illness and has been practiced since thousands of years.<sup>1</sup> Cupping is the practice of applying cups by means of heat or suction to specific and different parts of the body. This therapy is one of the oldest and most effective methods of releasing toxins from the body's tissues and organs. Cupping is a safe, simple and inexpensive technique used to alleviate the pain and discomfort arising from disorders of the internal organs, muscle spasms, joint pains, and numerous other conditions.<sup>2</sup> Cupping is of two types: Dry cupping- This is the process of using a vacuum on different areas of the body in order to gather the blood in that area without incisions. 70% of diseases, pains and ailments are due to the blood being unable to reach certain parts of the body. Wet cupping- This is the process of using a vacuum at different points on the body but with incisions in order to remove 'harmful' blood which lies just beneath the surface of the skin.<sup>3</sup>

**Historical background:** The Ebers Papyrus, one of the oldest medical textbooks in the world, describes the systematic use of cupping by the early Egyptians, as far back as 1550 B.C.<sup>1</sup> Hippocrates described both dry and wet cupping in his treatise "Guide to Clinical Treatment" which has been widely employed for the cure of broad range of conditions and gaining popularity worldwide. Even the followers of Hippocrates in 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. strongly believed in bleeding patients.<sup>1,2</sup> In Turkish folk medicine this bleeding method was used when a sudden rise in blood pressure endangered life. In 1830s, when antibiotics were unknown in England, this was the method used to draw out and eliminate poisons and infections from the body.<sup>4</sup> In 1950s, the clinical efficacy of cupping was confirmed by researchers of China and acupuncturists from the Soviet Union, and was established as an official therapeutic practice in hospitals all over China.<sup>5</sup>

### II. Methods:

For description of cupping therapy in Unani medicine, available authentic text of Unani Medicine was searched. Literature was also searched on PubMed/Google Scholar with the keywords; Scientific studies on cupping, efficacy of cupping therapy in various diseases, mode of action of cupping therapy, changes in blood after cupping therapy etc.

<sup>2,1</sup> **Unani concept:** Hijama is an Arabic name of cupping which means sucking.<sup>1</sup>

**Types of Hijama:** It is classified into two types:

1. Hijamabilshurt (wet cupping/cupping with scarification)
2. Hijamabilashurt (dry cupping/cupping without scarification)<sup>1,6</sup>

**Wet cupping:** In this type of cupping, beside the application of cups few superficial scarifications are also made over the site.<sup>2</sup> Cupping with bloodletting works on the principle of tanqiamawad (detoxification).

**Dry cupping:** In this type of cupping, cups are applied on skin of different areas of the body without incisions and vacuum is created by suction to increase the blood flow in that area. Dry cupping works on the principle of imalemawad.<sup>6</sup>

**Principles:**

1. It has to be carried out in the mid lunar month because the humours are fully agitated and activated during this time.
2. The preferred time for cupping is after noon as this is the most moderate time of the day.<sup>7,8</sup>
3. It has to be performed preferably in summer season as elimination of madda (morbid matter) is easy during this season; as the consistency of the humours remains thin and the same can easily enter the microvasculature and be eliminated from the body.<sup>8</sup>
4. It is preferred in individuals with diluted blood than in concentrated blood.<sup>7,8</sup>
5. It is indicated at least after two hours of meals.
6. The person should be given muqawwimeda (stomachic) and daf'iahmawadsharbat (morbid matter eliminating syrup) like sharbatanar, saib, santra, kasni, sirka, shikanjabeen prior to cupping.<sup>8</sup>
7. Persons having viscid blood should be advised to take bath one hour prior to cupping.<sup>7</sup>
8. Cupping should not be performed after strenuous work and coitus, as it causes kasraatahleemadda (excessive catabolism) and weakness.<sup>8</sup>

**Benefits:**

1. It diverts the flow of madda to the site of application.<sup>9</sup>
2. It not only improves the circulation but also provides better nutrition to the area where it is applied.<sup>6</sup>
3. For the local evacuation of humours, cupping is better than venesection as it removes the blood or morbid material from that particular part where it is applied without affecting the adjacent organs.<sup>7</sup>
4. It regulates the flow of energy and blood, adds strength and effectiveness to many therapeutic applications.<sup>4</sup>
5. It does not produce weakness as compared to venesection.<sup>7</sup>
6. It does not affect the vital organs, thus produces no serious disturbances.<sup>7</sup>

**Side effects:**

1. Cupping causes blood to be drawn to the surface of the skin, which can cause red marks, swelling and bruising.
2. Wet cupping may increase the risk of infection, as the skin barrier is compromised.<sup>6</sup>

**Contraindications:**

1. After vigorous exercise for fear of dehydration and general weakness.<sup>8</sup>
2. Infants below two years and in elderly persons above sixty years of age since the humours are viscid in these age groups.<sup>1,8</sup>
3. At the beginning and the end of the lunar month.<sup>8,9</sup>
4. Extremely cold or hot weather.<sup>7,8</sup>
5. In standing or sitting position as the person may get fainted during the procedure, if proper support is not provided.<sup>8</sup>
6. On scaly or burned skin, skin with dermatitis, ulceration, swelling; or over an artery or the heart.<sup>4</sup>
7. Patients with bleeding disorders such as aplastic anaemia, haemophilia, leukaemia etc.<sup>1</sup>
8. After eating, coitus and bathing.<sup>7,8</sup> (after bath, the skin becomes thick and it needs deeper incision to take out the blood, which causes severe pain and weakness).<sup>8,10</sup>
9. On chest and abdomen<sup>4</sup> especially in pregnant women during the first trimester.<sup>1,4</sup>

**Safety concerns:**

1. The patient's blood pressure and pulse must be checked prior to the procedure.
2. The practitioner must wear disposable latex gloves while carrying out the procedure.
3. Equipment must be thoroughly sterilised.
4. The blades used for wet cupping incisions should be disposable.
5. The incisions in wet cupping should be superficial, involving the epidermis only.
6. An antiseptic cream should be applied to the incisions after the procedure.
7. The patient should be questioned for any unusual sensation or fever.<sup>1,2,4</sup>
8. The patient must be instructed to sit and not to make sudden movements while cupping.<sup>4</sup>

**Procedure:**

1. The procedure, objectives and consequences of the technique should be explained clearly to the patient and prior consent to be taken.
2. The patient is made to lie in prone position and under all aseptic precautions cups are applied over the indicated site for the particular disease.
3. Negative pressure is created inside the cups with a vacuum pump to increase the blood flow to the site of cupping area and cups are allowed to remain adhered to the site for few minutes and then a few superficial incisions are given over the congested area with a sharp sterile blade (No. 11).
4. The cups are fixed over the skin for 10 min until the process of oozing of blood is completed.
5. Blood is drawn and measured followed by sterile dressing.
6. According to literature report of Unani medicine, the application of dry cupping should be followed by wet cupping. Dry cups are applied for a suitable duration until humours diverts towards the cupping area. Cupping causes an increase in blood flow to the affected area and the tissues beneath the cup may be drawn up and swell. During this time incision should be given to allow the slow oozing of blood.
7. In obese persons with akhlat galeeza (morbid humours) cups are applied twice with an intension to remove latifmayikhoon (liquid blood) in first sitting followed by expulsion of ghaleezkhoon (viscous blood) in subsequent sitting. Persons having thick skin require deeper incision to take out the blood with simultaneous application of liniment of muffatehwamullayanjildadvia (vasodilator & skin softener drugs).<sup>11</sup>

**2.2 Mode of action:** Cupping causes the tissues beneath the cup to be drawn up and swell; enhance the blood flow to the affected area. This enhanced blood flow under the cup draws sammimawad (toxic matter) away from the nearby tissues and organs to the skin, from where they are expelled out (tanqiamawad). The release of the vacuum redirects "toxic" blood that had pooled at the site and diverts it to other areas of the body, thus allowing "fresh" blood to replace it. Cupping diverts toxins and impurities from important organs such as the liver or kidney to the less important organ like the skin. In dry cupping, the toxins are brought to the underlying skin where as in wet cupping the toxins are brought out of the body.<sup>2</sup>

**2.3 Mechanism of wet cupping:** In wet cupping, uplifting of the skin inside the cup allows the better collection of interstitial fluids and filtered fluids leading to separation of the skin, subcutaneous tissues and underlying tissue layers and break down the tissue adhesions. Skin puncturing allows the escape of collected fluids through skin puncture sites. Bleeding at points of capillary trauma may take place as skin is richly supplied by capillary networks. Cupping after skin puncturing drains collected fluids in the cupped area with blood from injured capillaries, until hemostasis is achieved when the coagulation pathway is stimulated by contact of blood with tissue fluids.<sup>12</sup>

**Table No-1:** Indication of cupping therapy in gynecological disorders

Diseases	Type of cupping	Site of application	Time of application	Benefits
<b>Ehtebase tams (Amenorrhoea)</b>	Wet cupping <sup>7-10,13-20.</sup>	<b>Common sites:</b> 1-Calves <sup>7-10,13-20</sup> apply cups 15-20 cm above the ankle & 6 cm below the knee. Incisions are made deep enough to draw the blood from the deeper parts <sup>10</sup> and create suction 30 times at this place. <sup>1,2</sup> Two medium size cups are applied over the calf muscles & 8-10 incisions up to a depth of 2-3 mm are given with sterile blade (no 11) and time required for the procedure is 5-10 mts.	2 or 3 days prior to the expected date of menstruation on one day on one calf followed by its application on next day on second calf to induce menstruation, it is more beneficial in obese and muscular woman. <sup>9,14,15</sup>	Cupping of calf muscles is similar to venesection of saphenous vein; as it eliminates more blood because the calf muscles are the lower dependent part and mawadin normal condition has a tendency to flow towards the lower part of the body and the same can be sucked out with cupping. Uterus is the natural passage for excretion of fuzlatdamwia (metabolites) and when these fuzlat reaches from upper to lower part of the body, tabiyat tries to expel it out from the uterus in the form of menstruation which results in tanqiya badan. <sup>13</sup> Wet cupping works on the principle of

		<p><b>Other sites:</b>                      1- Calves and ankle,<sup>14,17</sup>                      2- Ankle,<sup>7</sup>                      3- Pelvis &amp; adjacent organs.<sup>15</sup></p>		<p>tanqiamawad and removes the toxic blood from the body, thus it detoxify the body.<sup>7</sup>                      Application of wet cupping over the calf muscles is more beneficial in comparison to venesection of saphenous vein to induce menstruation in obese women who are pale and puffy having narrow uterine vessels and whose blood is thin; as venesection fails to evacuate the sufficient amount of blood from the narrow uterine vessels but the cupping does, as it purifies the blood and helps to induce menstruation.<sup>7,15</sup>                      Cupping over the calf muscles forcefully absorb morbid matter from the upper part of the body<sup>11</sup> and divert it towards the uterus especially in obese women.<sup>17</sup>                      Cupping over the calves and ankle is more suitable in obese women<sup>14,17</sup> to divert the flow of blood towards the uterus to induce menstruation.<sup>17</sup>                      Application of wet cupping over the perineum absorbs the blood from the whole body and induces the menstruation, thus causes tanqiabadan.<sup>8,10,13</sup></p>
<p><b>Kasrate tams (Menorrhagia)</b></p>	<p>Dry cupping)                      10,14-18</p>	<p><b>Common sites:</b>                      1-Below the breast<sup>7,14-18</sup>                      2-Lower abdomen.<sup>16</sup>  <b>Other sites:</b>                      1-Buttocks,<sup>8</sup>                      2-Upper &amp; lower back,                      3-Thigh.</p>	<p>Two large size cups are applied below the bust line for 10 mts during heavy menstrual bleeding.</p>	<p>Dry cupping below the breast is beneficial in menorrhagia to arrest bleeding from the uterus.<sup>7,8,14-18</sup> Large cups are applied on inferior surface of breast as veins from uterus to breast reach at this level.<sup>3,6,8</sup> Moreover, large cups forcefully draw the blood away from the uterus<sup>15</sup> that's why, in uterine diseases for imalaemawad cupping is applied below the breast.<sup>8,17</sup>                      Application of dry cupping over the lower abdomen to control menstrual bleeding.<sup>16</sup>                      Application of dry cupping on both the buttocks is useful to arrest bleeding from the uterus.<sup>7,8</sup>                      Application of dry cupping in</p>

				between the buttocks <sup>20</sup> to reduce pelvic congestion if kasrate tamsis due to imtelaekhoon (PID). <sup>14,15</sup> Application of dry cupping over the upper and low back and thigh, if kasrate tams is due to bawaseerrehm (uterine polyp). <sup>9</sup>
<b>Usre tams (Dysmenorrhoea)</b>	Dry cupping <sup>7, 15,19</sup>	Lower abdomen or umbilicus.	Three medium size cups are applied below the umbilicus for 10 mts during menstruation.	Application of dry cupping over the lower abdomen is recommended to relieve pain during menses. <sup>15</sup> Application of dry cupping below the umbilicis suggested to relieve painful menstruation especially in young girls. <sup>7,19</sup>
<b>Inzalaqwa inqalab rehm (Uterine prolapse &amp; inversion)</b>	Dry cupping <sup>9, 14,15,18</sup>	Breastor umbilicus or back.		Application of dry cupping below the breast is preferable <sup>7,9</sup> then below the umbilicus in uterine prolapse. <sup>9,14,18</sup> Application of dry cupping over the umbilicus for longer duration is recommended to regress the uterine prolapse. <sup>15</sup> Application of dry cupping below the umbilicus and over the back is recommended in inversion of uterus. <sup>14</sup>
<b>Mailanurrehm (Uterine displacement)</b>	Dry cupping <sup>1 4,15</sup>	Belowthe umbilicus. <sup>14</sup>		Application ofdry cupping on contra lateral side of displacement may leads to return of uterus towards its original place. <sup>16</sup>
<b>Warm rehmwaunsayain (Metritis&amp;Oophoritis)</b>	Dry cupping <sup>7, 8,14</sup>	Thigh & buttocks		Application ofdry cupping over the thigh is useful inmetritis. <sup>8</sup> Application ofdry cupping over the buttocks is beneficial in oophoritis <sup>7</sup> and metritis. <sup>14</sup>
<b>Hikatulfarj (Pruritus vulvae)</b>	Dry cupping	Buttocks or supra pubic region		Application ofdry cupping over the buttocks is useful in pruritus vulvae. <sup>7</sup>

#### 2.4 Research studies on cupping:

1: Inanmdar et al <sup>21</sup> study on effect of dry cupping in patients with primary dysmenorrhoea showed that significant reduction in pain was observed in cupping group(which was applied below the umbilicus) as compared to other groups where only either mefenemic acid (standard control) or fenugreek (research drug) was used alone.

2: Ruqiyaet al<sup>22</sup> study on effect of wet cupping in patients with secondary amenorrhoea demonstrated that application of wet cupping over the calf muscles was effective in amenorrhoea as it diverts the flow of blood towards the uterus and facilitates tanqiyabandanby eliminating the toxic substances in the form of menstruation. Thus, the result of this study provides supportive evidence for effectiveness of cupping in the management of secondary amenorrhoea.

3. Mahdavi et al<sup>3</sup> study on evaluation of the effect of cupping therapy on biochemical, hematological and immunological factors of human venous blood concluded that the main effect of cupping is likely via two pathways:

1. Regulates coagulation and anti-coagulation systems,

2. Decreases hematocrit and then increases the blood flow and also end-organ oxygenation.

4: Niasari et al<sup>23</sup> study was to determine the effect of wet cupping on serum lipid concentration in healthy young men exhibit that cupping was an effective method of reducing LDL cholesterol in men and have a preventive effect against atherosclerosis.

5: Mustafa et al<sup>24</sup> study on effect of wet cupping on serum lipid profile levels in patients with hyperlipidemia & its correlation with some metals ions revealed that significant increase in serum zinc concentration was observed (which is essential in lipid metabolism) & a positive correlation with HDL cholesterol after cupping. So, zinc deficiency causes hypercholesteremia.

6: El Hennawy<sup>22</sup> study on "Cupping Therapy and Infertility" demonstrated that ovulation and conception occur as cupping activates and clears the veins, arteries and capillaries, increases blood flow to the uterus, regulates and balances the hormones, stimulates ovulation in women, strengthens the immune system and decreases the stress.

7: Parker D<sup>25</sup> study to explore the efficacy of cupping therapy as a cure for all diseases. The blood extracted from different areas in the cup was analyzed under dark & light field microscopy. The dry layered blood sample viewed under light field microscopy showed the high concentrations of toxic metals, chemical as well as evidence of bacterial and parasitic activity. The appearance of the live blood under dark field microscope showed high concentrations of acids and inflammatory proteins. So, when the blood was removed from an area where the patient was experiencing pain and inflammation will bring about symptomatic relief, while encouraging fresh circulating blood, nutrients and oxygen to affected area thus providing healing and resolution.

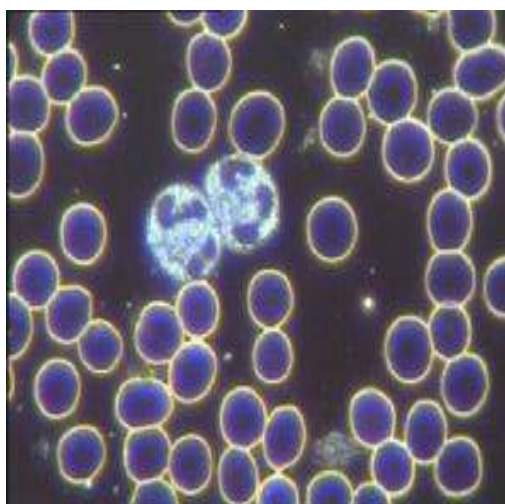


Fig. no: 1

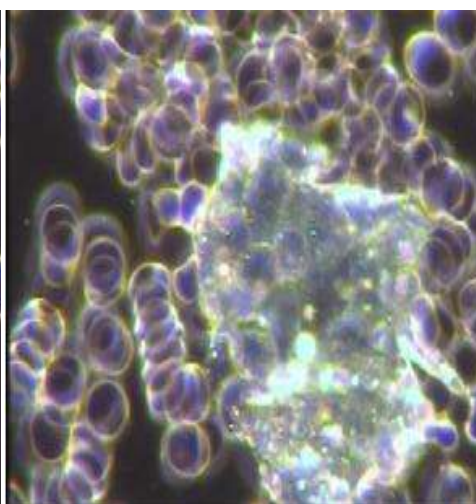


Fig. no: 2

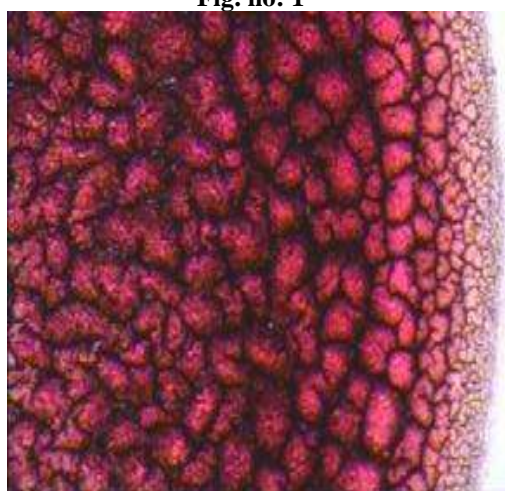


Fig. no: 3

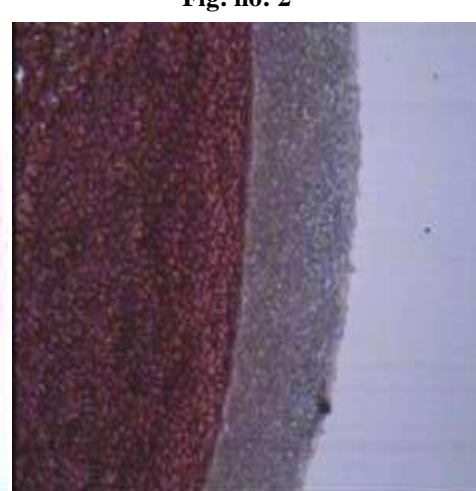


Fig. no: 4

Fig. no- 1: The normal live blood picture under dark field microscopy.

Observe the red cells sitting separately in their own space, having the freedom to travel around the body network of capillaries and the free-floating white blood cells having the freedom to patrol around the body searching out toxins and pathogens.

**Fig. no -2:Proteinous waste found in live blood sample underdark field microscopy.**

**Fig.no-3:Normal dry layered blood sample under light field microscopy.**

Observe the absence of any white lakes, the clean, finely cut edge showing no toxic metals and the black lines all joining together like a matrix.

**Fig no-4: Toxic metals appearing on edge of dried blood sample under light field microscopy.**The thicker and denser the grey band, the more metals are in the blood.

### III. Conclusion:

Cupping is an ancient mode of therapy for various ailments, practiced and recommended by ancient healers. Cupping is considered as one of the curative skills in Unani medicine that was used for many years all over the world. This therapy is a great alternative to modern medicine where treatment for many diseases is unavailable. There is a need to reproduce the study in a larger number of patients for longer duration which may add more power and greater confidence to this technique. Thanks to the latest research and technology, now science has proved the benefits of cupping therapy in treating numerous diseases. So it seems by identifying all scientific aspects of cupping like its mechanisms, it can be used easily in day to day clinical practice. However, practicing cupping therapy using pressure suction force, minimal skin scarifications (about 0.1 mm in depth to open skin barrier, horny layer of epidermis) and pressure suction force for the second time at skin sites away from superficial veins confirms that wet cupping is an excretory rather than a mere bleeding procedure which remove the noxious agents to outside of human body seems more safe and effective than harmful and adverse effects of pharmacological drugs.<sup>12</sup>In Unani system of medicine with specific reference to gynecological disorders, cupping therapy was focused only on menstrual disorders but it is the need of an hour to explore its efficacy scientifically on other diseases such as infertility, PCOD, PID, POP etc. Cupping therapy is a wonderful treatment on earth which activates the natural healing power of the body. It is a treatment that shows immediate and long lasting results. Cupping therapy has many advantages such as simple, less expensive tool which can be easily learned & applied together with good clinical effects and virtually no side effects. It is suitable for people from all walks of life for a variety of conditions and can be used both in the hospital and at home to promote health and wellbeing. So, cupping therapy is considered as the best solution to detoxify the body.

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