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HIJAMAH (CUPPING THERAPY) – A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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Hijamah, Depurates, Bad matters, Humours.

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ABSTRACT

The Unani system of medicine originated from Greece. Hippocrates is the father of medicine who initiated the humoral theory. Then Arab and Persian physicians like Rhazes, Avicenna constructed and developed this system. The aim of this study is to provide comprehensive review in cupping therapy which is now practiced effectively worldwide. This review was done by analyzing authentic Unani texts, thesis reports and published scientific journals. According to that the humoral theory which consists four humours, and proper balance of these humours ensures efficient metabolism, prevents the build-up of toxins, and maintains optimum health. Imbalance is often the root cause for origin and development of diseases. When treating such ailments, it is carried out by correcting qualitative and quantitative imbalances of humours. *Hijamah* is a method used to correct, evacuate or divert morbid humours in Unani medicine. According to Avicenna ‘cupping depurates and balances the humours. Thus cupping removes bad or morbid matters from the body, neutralizes the humours and helps to regain the health. Nowadays, it is being proved by various clinical trials that cupping therapy has beneficial effects on human beings. According to latest scientific interpretation, the mechanism of action most likely involves a local increase and activation of blood flow and increases the elimination of metabolites or moves them from one part to another part of body. Furthermore it activates the immune system. Therefore it removes the pathogenic factors lead to ease local symptoms and helps to regain the health.

INTRODUCTION:

The Unani system of medicine originated from Greece. Greek philosophy was the basis for it. Hippocrates (460-377 BC) freed medicine from the clutches of superstitions and gave it the status of science. Galen (131-210 AD) stabilized its foundation, on which Arab and Persian physicians like Rhazes (850-925 AD), Avicenna (980-1037 AD) constructed and developed as system of medicine. The Greek and Roman literature was translated into Arabic and Persian language and reviewed during the time of renaissance; the Muslim rulers extended their patronage and propagated it all over the world wherever they went and they preferred to keep its identity as Unani medicine only. As this medical system was brought up under the umbrella of Islamic heritage; Western historians named it as Islamic medicine.

Unani medicine is based on Hippocratic theory of four humours i.e. *Khoon* (blood), *Bulgham* (phlegm), *Safra* (bile) and *Sauda* (black bile). A proper balance of these four humours within a person's body ensures efficient metabolism, prevents the build-up of toxins, and maintains optimum health¹. One of the most important functions of the humours is to maintain the ideal qualitative states associated with the *Mizaj* (temperament) of an individual. Humoral imbalance is often the root cause in the origin and development of a particular illness².

Unani medicine always gives more important to prevent the diseases rather than treating the diseases. Therefore it emphasizes the strict management of six essential factors such as

1. Fresh Air
2. Food and Drink
3. Body Movement and Repose
4. Mental Movement and Repose
5. Sleep and Wakefulness
6. Retention and Evacuation

Unani medicine believes that the restoration of equilibrium of various elements and faculties of the human body depends on these six 'essential' factors. They are called essential for the reason that if anyone who does not maintain these factors in a proper manner, his or her life will be at risk, sooner or later he will end up with a life threatening disease, and their adequate supply only will ensure healthy life.

In Unani medicine various types of therapies are employed in order to prevent and treat the diseases. The treatment approaches are³.

1. *Ilaj bil Ghiza* (Dietotherapy)
2. *Ilaj bid Dawa* (Pharmacotherapy)
3. *Ilaj bil Yad* (Surgical intervention).

4. *Ilaj -bit -Tadbeer* (regimental therapy)

Regimental therapy includes venesection, cupping, diaphoresis, diuresis, turkish bath, massage, cauterization, purging, emesis, exercise, and leeching.

HIJAMAH (CUPPING THERAPY)

Al-hijamah is derived from the Arabic word *hajm* which means "sucking". It is process of balancing the humour and depurates or evacuates the bad body fluids by using suction cups. It also helps to draw out stagnant congested blood, as well as other morbid humors from deeper tissues to the superficial areas such as skin and evacuated from it. *Hijamah* is a method used for local evacuation or diversion of morbid humours in which a horn (singhi) is attached to the surface of the skin of the diseased part by applying negative pressure³. This practice was highly encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Types

- (a) *Hijamat Bila Shurt* (Dry cupping)- A horn or cupping glass is attached to the surface of the skin of the diseased part and negative pressure is created by using vacuum⁴.
- (b) *Hijamat Bil Shurt* (Wet cupping)- the skin immediately below the cup is cross cut superficially several times (lacerated) so that blood would actually be drawn by the vacuum from the skin into the cup⁴.

Methodology and Precautions

The vacuum in the glass or hard plastic suction cup is usually created in one of two different ways. Traditional method, the cup is heated by a flame from an alcohol soaked cotton pad or taper, and then applied immediately to the skin. As the cup cools, the air inside contracts, creating a partial vacuum, so seals the jar to the skin. Modern method, a hand operated vacuum pump is attached to the glass cup, and suction applied by manual action.

Before performing the cupping patients should be advised to take plenty of water. Physician should use sterile disposable latex gloves and sterilized disposable blades and monitor the patient's blood pressure and pulse rate before performing the *hijamah*. The cups should be sterilized immediately before use. The incisions in wet cupping should be superficial and the patient should be monitored during and after wet cupping at least for an hour. An antiseptic cream should be applied after wet cupping and the patient should be advised to abstain food for 1 hour after performing the cupping.

According to Avicenna cupping is not advised at beginning and at the end of the lunar month. The best days for cupping is generally considered to be around the middle of the lunar month and it is around 17th, 19th day of the lunar month. The best time is second and third hours of

the day and avoid cupping after bath. Cupping should be performed with extreme cautious in children below 2 years and elderly after 60 years¹.

Patho-physiological Aspects of *Hijamah*

According to Avicenna ‘cupping purifies skin or organ more effectively and it withdraws thin blood rather than thick blood¹. Thus cupping removes bad or morbid materials from the body and helps to Ta’deel (neutralize) the *Akhlats* (humours) and also helps to regain the health⁵.

Cupping causes the tissues beneath the cup to be drawn up and swell, and an increase in blood flow to the affected area. This enhanced blood flow under the cup, draws impurities and toxins away from the nearby tissues and organs to the skin, from where they are expelled^{5,6}. Cupping diverts toxins and impurities from important organs such as the liver or kidney to the less important organ, like skin¹. It helps to divert bad matters from the direction of its flow as in menorrhoea, cupping under the breast helps to check the menstruation¹ and in haemoptysis, cupping on the area in between the shoulders would be beneficial⁵.

It can be used to restore the organ from its deviated place to normal position and it can be used to warm the organ and attracts the blood towards it¹. Most of the time pain and many diseases arise from stagnation, congestion and blockage of energy, like the vital forces or of vital fluid or humors, like blood, phlegm or lymph. The suction applied by cupping sucks out and breaks up that congestion, stagnation, or blockage, restoring a free flow to the vital energies and humors of the organism. In addition to that, cupping also disperses pathogenic heat, toxins and inflammation by bringing them to surface for release.

The Beneficial Outcomes of *Hijamah*

The most obvious benefits of cupping are a relief of pain and a relaxation and increased suppleness of stiff tendons and muscles. Cupping increases the cleansing flow of lymph, while removing congested blood from the muscles. If cupping is applied to the joints, the blood flow to the joints is increased and there’s an increased secretion of synovial fluid into the joint cavity. *Hijamah* is very useful in constipation, diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), headaches, depression, emotional problems, menstrual pain, suppressed or irregular menses, back pain, arthritis, traumatic injuries, lumbago, sciatica, asthma, bronchitis, piles, hydrocele, epistaxis, etc.

Cupping Therapy Mentioned in Islamic or Prophetic Medicine

The prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘o servants of Allah! seek treatment, Allah did not create a disease without creating a cure therefore, except one disease (which is) death.’”(At-Tirmidhi). Further he (Peace be upon him) said “Indeed the best of remedies you have is

hijamah.” (Saheeh al –Bukhaaree). In addition to that he (peace be upon him) has said that “if there was something excellent to be used as a remedy then it is *hijamah.*”(Saheeh Sunan abi Dawud – 3857, Saheeh sunan Maajah - 3476).

Hijamah and Scientific Studies

Hijamat bil Shurt (wet cupping) in combination with Unani formulation for *Waja ul Mafasil* (Arthritis) is better than when compared with formulation alone⁷. Two randomized clinical trials (RCT) suggested that there is a significant pain reduction for cupping in low back pain compared with usual care ($P < 0.01$) and analgesia ($P < 0.001$). Another two RCTs also showed positive effects of cupping in cancer pain ($P < 0.05$) and trigeminal neuralgia ($P < 0.01$) compared with anticancer drugs and analgesics, respectively. Two RCTs reported favorable effects of cupping on pain in brachialgia compared with usual care ($P = 0.03$) or heat pad ($P < 0.001$)⁸.

Traditional wet-cupping care delivered in a primary care setting was safe and acceptable to patients with nonspecific low back pain. Wet-cupping care was significantly more effective in reducing bodily pain than usual care at 3-month follow-up⁹. In a another clinical trial it is concluded that with the wet-cupping leads to clinical relevant benefits for primary care patients with headache¹⁰.

Dry cupping lowered the blood glucose in type 2 Diabetes mellitus, marked improvement in the majority of patients in quality of life parameters, with a marked reduction in BP and body mass in several patients, and a welcome fall in elevated total blood cholesterol levels and adjuvant cupping therapy provides pain relief, significantly improves range of motion and has a positive impact on the reduction of crepitus¹¹. The treatment was safe and well tolerated. Cupping therapy may be effective in relieving the pain and other symptoms related to Carpal Tunnel Syndrome¹².

Wet cupping may be an effective method of reducing LDL cholesterol in men and consequently may have a preventive effect against atherosclerosis¹³. Bloodletting cupping therapy combined with conventional therapy may improve the clinical condition of patients with Rheumatoid Arthritis. It has modulatory effects on the innate (NK) and adaptive cellular (SIL-2R conc.) immune responses that could be used as monitoring tools for disease activity and prognosis¹⁴.

Cupping therapy significantly affects the levels of certain immune cells and inflammatory markers. Cupping may exert local inflammatory response through local vascular damage (increased platelets and lymphocytes) which stimulate healing¹⁵.

CONCLUSION:

Hijamah (Cupping therapy) is a procedure in which vacuum is created by means of fire or suction, using special types of cups on specific areas of the body. This procedure is one of the oldest and most effective methods of evacuating toxins from the body tissues. It is a safe, non-invasive and inexpensive technique, mostly used to alleviate the pain and discomfort arising from disorders of the lungs, heart and other internal organs, and muscle spasms, joint pains, and numerous other conditions.

Cupping causes hyperaemia in the tissues beneath the cup which leads increased blood flow to that area. This enhanced blood flow under the cup washes, impurities and toxins away from the tissues and organs and draws superficially towards skin for easy evacuation, from where they are expelled. Thus it helps to relieve the symptoms caused by the diseases and ensures healthy life.

Conflict of Interest: None

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