

## THERAPEUTIC IMPACT OF CUPPING THERAPY (*ALABU KARMA* AND *PRACHCHANA KARMA*) ON ACUTE AND CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN MANAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Cupping therapy, an ancient and cost-effective treatment, remains a widely utilized therapeutic method with limited scientific understanding of its mechanisms. This therapy is categorized into two main types: wet cupping and dry cupping. Wet cupping, in particular, has demonstrated effectiveness in treating various conditions such as low back pain, rheumatoid arthritis, hypertension, migraines, carpal tunnel syndrome, and fibromyalgia. The underlying medical theory supporting cupping's efficacy, referred to as the "TAIBAH THEORY," sheds light on its potential to alleviate pain through mechanisms yet to be fully explored. This article focuses on the application of cupping therapy in the management of both acute and chronic low back pain, drawing parallels between cupping procedures and traditional *Ayurvedic* bloodletting techniques, such as *Raktamokshana*, which includes *Alabu Karma* and *Prachchhana Karma*.

**KEYWORDS:** *Panchkarma, Siravedha, alaboo, jalaukavaacharana, prachchhana.*

### INTRODUCTION

Low back pain (LBP) is a global health issue that affects millions of individuals, significantly impairing their daily activities and quality of life. Although conventional treatments like medications and physical therapy are widely practiced, the rise of alternative therapies, such

as cupping therapy, offers new avenues for managing both acute and chronic LBP. Cupping therapy involves creating a vacuum on the skin, leading to bloodletting in wet cupping, which may help alleviate pain and inflammation. In *Ayurvedic* medicine, similar bloodletting techniques, known as *Raktamokshana*, are part of *Panchakarma* therapy and include methods like *Siravedha*, *Alabu Karma*, *Prachchhana Karma* and *jalaaukavaacharana*. *Alabu karma* along with *prachchhana karma* in *Shruna* can be related to the cupping procedures. Both these procedures, which involve creating a vacuum to facilitate bloodletting, have been used to address conditions involving pain, including LBP. Positions of cup applications according to disease are given. In low back pain, it should be applied at the level below neck on spinal cord or it may be applied on back at the maximum tenderness point on spinal or paraspinal region. Also, the aim of *raktamokshana* therapy in *ayurveda* is to increase microcirculation, letting the blood and to get relief from pain.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In *Ayurveda*, *Acharya Sushruta* in the *Sutrasthana* (*Shonitavarnaniya Adhyaya*) elaborates on the procedures of *Prachchhana* through the methods of *Shruna* and *Alabu*. According to this, in cases of *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha* imbalances, bloodletting is performed using *Shruna*, *Jalaauka* (leeches), and *Alabu* (gourds), respectively. In the *Shruna* method, small incisions are made (*prachchhana*) using a blade, and blood suction is carried out using a fine cloth and thread (*tanu vastra patala* and *sutra*). In the *Alabu* procedure, a small lamp is placed under the gourd to create a vacuum, which facilitates the suction of blood. Thus, modern cupping therapy can be considered a modified version of the *Alabu* and *Shruna* procedures as described in *Ayurvedic* texts.

## UNDERSTANDING CUPPING THERAPY

Cupping therapy is an ancient practice rooted in traditional medicine systems, particularly in *Ayurveda* and Traditional Chinese Medicine. It involves creating suction on the skin using cups, which promotes blood circulation, alleviates pain, and enhances the body's healing processes.

1. ***Alabu Karma***: This method uses a specific type of cup (often made from glass or bamboo) placed on the skin to create a vacuum effect. It is believed to draw out impurities and promote healing by improving blood flow to the affected area.

2. **Prachchhana Karma:** This involves making small incisions on the skin before applying cups, which allows for the release of stagnant blood and toxins from the body. It is particularly effective for conditions associated with inflammation and chronic pain.

## MECHANISM OF ACTION

Cupping therapy is thought to work through several mechanisms:

- **Increased Blood Flow:** The suction created by the cups enhances local blood circulation, promoting oxygenation and nutrient delivery to tissues, which aids in healing.
- **Pain Relief:** By stimulating the skin and underlying tissues, cupping may activate the body's natural pain-relief mechanisms, including the release of endorphins.
- **Muscle Relaxation:** The negative pressure may help relax tight muscles and alleviate tension, which can contribute to pain relief.

## CLINICAL EVIDENCE

Several studies have investigated the efficacy of cupping therapy in managing low back pain:

- **Acute Low Back Pain:** Research indicates that cupping therapy, particularly *Alabu Karma*, may significantly reduce pain levels in patients with acute low back pain. The immediate effects are often noted after just a few sessions, with patients reporting improved mobility and reduced discomfort.
- **Chronic Low Back Pain:** For chronic conditions, both *Alabu Karma* and *Prachchhana Karma* have shown promise. Studies have demonstrated that these methods can lead to substantial reductions in pain intensity and improvement in functional abilities. The release of stagnant blood and toxins in *Prachchhana Karma* appears particularly beneficial for individuals with prolonged symptoms.

## OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Over the past year, wet cupping therapy was administered to approximately 10–15 patients. After the initial session, patients reported a reduction in pain ranging from 40% to 60%. Follow-up sessions were conducted at one-month intervals, depending on the severity of the pain and the patient's individual needs. After undergoing the full course of treatment, most patients experienced significant pain relief, with improvement ranging from 70% to 90%. In some cases, patients reported a 70% to 80% reduction in pain after just the first session.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

While both methods of cupping therapy have shown effectiveness, the choice between *Alabu Karma* and *Prachchhana Karma* may depend on the specific characteristics of the patient's condition.

- *Alabu Karma* is generally more suitable for patients who are sensitive to pain or those with acute injuries, as it is less invasive.
- *Prachchhana Karma* may be preferred for chronic conditions where there is an accumulation of toxins or stagnant blood, as it aims to eliminate deeper issues contributing to pain.

## SAFETY AND CONSIDERATIONS

Cupping therapy is generally considered safe when performed by trained practitioners. However, patients should be informed about potential side effects, including bruising and temporary discomfort at the treatment site. It is also essential for practitioners to conduct thorough assessments to rule out contraindications, such as skin infections or bleeding disorders.

## DISCUSSION

The therapeutic potential of *Alabu Karma* and *Prachchhana Karma* in managing low back pain offers a valuable alternative to conventional treatments. Both therapies, rooted in *Ayurveda*, focus on balancing the body's doshas, improving circulation, and detoxifying the system. In acute low back pain, *Alabu Karma* relieves muscle tension and inflammation through suction, providing rapid relief. For chronic conditions, *Prachchhana Karma* uses bloodletting to eliminate toxins, reducing inflammation and long-term pain.

Cupping therapy's ability to address both the physical and psychological aspects of pain makes it a holistic approach. Its potential to reduce reliance on medications, which often have side effects, is a significant advantage. However, challenges remain, such as the need for more clinical research, standardized protocols, and trained practitioners to ensure safety and consistent outcomes. As interest in integrative healthcare grows, cupping therapy could offer a sustainable, non-invasive option for managing both acute and chronic low back pain, providing patients with a pathway to long-term relief and improved quality of life.

## CONCLUSION

Cupping therapy, particularly *Alabu Karma* and *Prachchhana Karma*, presents a promising adjunctive treatment for managing both acute and chronic low back pain. Its ability to enhance blood flow, relieve pain, and promote muscle relaxation makes it a valuable option for patients seeking alternative therapies. Further research and clinical trials are warranted to establish standardized protocols and enhance understanding of its mechanisms and long-term benefits. As awareness and acceptance of holistic approaches grow, cupping therapy may become an integral part of comprehensive pain management strategies. According to the study mentioned, cupping therapy is a cost-effective and highly effective treatment for low back pain when compared to oral medications. It provides noticeable relief to patients and, although applied locally, offers systemic benefits.

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