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Hijama therapy: Insight to futuristic Unani Pathy

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Abstract

Hijamah is an Unani regimnal mode of treatment which is carried out by application of cup shaped glass or plastic vessels on the body surface, creating vacuum by heat or by special suction apparatus. Hijamah or cupping therapy is an important emerging alternative non-pharmacological regimnal mode of treatment. Hijamah is beneficial in a large number of disorders.

Keywords: Hijamah, Unani, cupper

Introduction

The word Hijamah comes from the root Al-Hajm. Out of various meanings mentioned in different Arabic lexicons and dictionaries, most relevant is that Al-Hajm means “to suck” [1]. Hajjam (Cupper) or Massas (Sucker) is one who performs the operation termed Hijamah or one who scarifies and draws blood with the Mihjamah. On the other hand, Mihjam/Mihjamah (Plural Mahajim) or the Qarurah (glass vessel or the like) is the instrument of the Hajjam. And the Mishrat is the instrument, which is used for scarification or prickling the skin (Blade, Lancet or Scalpel) [2]. As such there is no definition of Hijamah in Unani classical literature. Keeping in view it’s all aspects, Hijamah can be defined as, “Hijamah is an Unani regimnal mode of treatment which is carried out by application of cup shaped glass or plastic vessels on the body surface, creating vacuum by heat or by special suction apparatus, in order to evacuate the morbid materials, to divert the material from the diseased part, to return a displaced organ to its natural position or to encourage the blood flow to the site of Hijamah [3].

The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates compiled extensive descriptions of the cupping application. He described two different types of cups: one with a narrow opening and a long handle and the other with a wider opening. The first type was used to treat deep accumulation of fluids, while the second type was used to treat the spread of pain. Cupping therapy was a popular historical treatment in Arabic and Islamic countries [4]. It was recommended by Arabic and Islamic physicians such as Ibn Sina, Al-Zahrawi, and Abu Bakr Al-Razi. Al-Zahrawi described cupping sites and illustrated cupping tools with diagrams. Cupping therapy practice spread to Italy and, subsequently, the rest of Europe between the 14th and 17th centuries, during the Renaissance. Cupping was a very popular treatment of gout and arthritis in Italy during this period [5].

Types of Hijamah Various classifications of Hijamah given in Unani classical literature are as under:

Depending upon whether scarification/incision (Shart) is given or not, Hijamah is of two types

1. Hijamat-bish-Shart (Wet Cupping/Cupping with Scarification)
2. Hijamat-bila-Shart (Dry Cupping/Cupping without Scarification)

Hijamat-bish-Shart, depending on its need can be of two types as [6]:

- a. Hijamat-e-Iztirariyah (Mandatory)
- b. Hijamat-e-Ikhtiyariyah (Optional)

Hijamat-bila-Shart (Dry Cupping) can further be of two sub types on the basis of method of cupping [7]:

- a. Hijamat-e-Nariyah (Cupping with Fire/Fire cupping)
- b. Hijamat-e-Ghair-Nariyah (Cupping without Fire)

Apart from these two types, Abul Qasim al-Zehravi has mentioned a third type of Hijamah in his treatise, Kitabut-Tasreef as [8]:

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3. Hijamat-e-Mai (Hijamah with hot decoction of drugs)

In earlier days when vacuum pumps were not available, a candle or some burning substance was used inside the cups to create vacuum. The vacuum thus created, adheres the cup to the skin. This was called Hijamat-e-Nariyah. Today the vacuum cup is used instead of flame (Hijamate-Ghair-Nariyah). In ancient times, cupping was done in a very special manner which is still in use in rural and tribal areas. In this method, horns of animals are used as a cup (Mihjahmah). With the advent of technology, cups have been highly sophisticated. Such modified cups are provided with a valve at the top and a hand operated pump. To fix the cup on an area, its edges are kept over the skin and the air inside the cup is sucked out with the help of suction pump so as to create the vacuum. Similarly, when the cup is needed to be removed, the valve is simply pulled up with the help of thumb and forefinger. This pulling of valve will allow the passage of air inside the cup and it will be detached by itself [9].

Classification of cupping therapy sets

A typical cupping therapy set should contain six or more different-sized cups and a method of suction. Cupping therapy sets can be classified into three main categories: the first category is “cupping sets related to the types of cups”, which includes plastic, glass, rubber, bamboo, ceramic, metal, and silicone cupping sets. The second category is “cupping sets related to the methods of suction”, which includes manual, automatic, and self-suction cupping sets. The third category is “cupping sets related to uses”, which includes facial, female, male, and massage cupping sets [10].

Indications

Cupping therapy has been used for health promotion, preventive, and therapeutic purposes. Cupping therapy has reported benefits in the treatment of lower back pain, neck and shoulder pain, headache and migraine, knee pain, facial paralysis, brachialgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, rheumatoid arthritis and asthma. These diseases can be categorized into localized diseases (neck pain, lower back pain, and knee pain) and systematic diseases (diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and rheumatoid arthritis). Cupping therapy sites are selected according to the treated ailment. The back is the most common site of application, followed by the chest, abdomen, buttocks, and legs. Other areas, such as the face, may also be treated by cupping [11].

Contraindications

In general, cupping is contraindicated directly on veins, arteries, nerves, skin inflammation, any skin lesion, body orifices, eyes, lymph nodes, or varicose veins. Cupping is also contraindicated on open wounds, bone fractures, and sites of deep vein thrombosis. Cupping therapy contraindications can be classified into absolute and relative contraindications. Until we have sufficient information regarding the safety of cupping therapy, it is absolutely contraindicated in cancer patients and those with any organ failure (renal failure, hepatic failure, and heart failure) [12].

Principal Advantages of Hijamat-bish-Shart Ibn Sena writes in his treatise Al-Qanun-fit-Tib, “Hijamat-bish-Shart has three advantages:

1. Hijamah results in Istafragh (evacuation of morbid material/humors) from the particular organ where Hijamah is done.
2. Conservation of the Jawhar-e-Rooh (essence of the pneuma) as the latter is not evacuated with the Akhlat (humors) which are being evacuated. In other types of Istafragat (evacuations), Jawhar-e-Rooh is evacuated with the Akhlat (humours) from the whole body.
3. Hijamah does not interfere with the Aa'zay-e-Ra'esa (vital organs), as there is no Istafrag (evacuation) from these organs which may cause weakness. Certain recommendations are to be followed in Hijamate-Ikhtiyariyah (Optional cupping) [13]:
4. It should be carried out in the mid of lunar month because the humors are fully agitated this at this time. It should be done in the afternoon as it is the most moderate time of the day.
5. Ibn-ul-Quf Masihi and Hakim Ali Geelani suggests, “Hijamah should be done preferably in summer season because the consistency of the humors remain in diluted state so it easily enters the microvasculature and can easily be eliminated through Hijamah”.
6. Ali Ibn Majusi suggests, “Hijamah should be preferably performed in the spring season of the year should be performed to a lesser extent in the extreme cold and heat conditions (i.e., summer and winter)”. It should be performed in persons with thin blood [14].
7. According to Hakim Ali Geelani, it should be avoided in those persons having viscid blood. 6. Hakim Ali Geelani suggests that the person to be cupped should not be empty stomach. To this Ibn-ulQuf Masihi adds, “The person should be given stomachic tonic and divergent beverages prior to Hijamah”. Hakim Ali Geelani further says, “Use of eggs before and after Hijamah should be avoided because it has been found experimentally harmful and such activity results in Laqva (facial paralysis)” [15].
8. It should be avoided in obese persons for the fear of Kastrat-e-Tahallul (excessive resolution).
9. It should be avoided below two years and above sixty years of age since the humors are viscid in these age groups. But according to Mansur Ibn Ilyas, Hijamah should be performed between twelve and sixty-years age group. Regarding the Hijamah in the children Allama Kabir-ud-Din and Khuaja Ahmed Rizwan quotes that a kid in two years age can be cupped but after sixty years it should be avoided [16].
10. Akbar Arzani in Meezan-ut-Tibb states that the Hijamah (cupping) and Irsal-e-Alq (leeching) can be used as substitute of Fasd (venesection) in the children.
11. It should be avoided soon after Hamam (Turkish bath), because it needs deeper incision to take out the blood, which causes severe pain and leads to weakness. But the persons having viscid blood are exempted from this condition as they already need a deeper incision.
12. It should be avoided before and after coitus. The person who has got cupped himself should not sleep immediately after Hijamah [17].
13. It should be avoided after vigorous exercises for the fear of dehydration and general weakness with the exception of viscid blood (increased haematocrit).

Table 1: Sites of Hijamat-bish-Shart and their indications ^[18].

S. No.	Sites	Indications
1.	Hamah/Yafookh	Confusional states, Vertigo. Diseases of Eye e.g., Scabies of ocular area, Eruptions of eye, Iridoptosis, etc. Facial pigmentation, Obtundation.
2.	Qamhadwah	
3.	Nuqrah	Conjunctivitis, Otagia, Heaviness of head and eye lids, Freckle lentigo, Namash, Vascular Keratitis, Tarsitis, Ocular Scabies, Halitosis, Aphthous stomatitis, Meningitis, Diphtheria and headache.
4.	Akhdain	Head tremor, Diseases of Face, Eyes, Ears, Teeth, Throat and Nose. e.g., Toothache, Lingual pain, Gingivitis, Conjunctivitis, Otitis, Headache, Migraine, Tonsillitis and Diphtheria.
5.	Zaqn	Diseases of Teeth, Face, Throat, Head, Mandible and Maxilla. e.g., Glossitis, Halitosis, Stomatitis, Aphthous, and Tonsillitis), Epilepsy and headache.
6.	Warkain	Haemorrhoids, Uterine pain, Proctitis, Haematuria, Hararat-ul-Kilyatain (hotness of kidneys), Burning micturation, Anal throbbing), bleeding per rectum, Oophritis, Badbu-e-Reham wa Badb-e-faraj (Fowl odouring uterus and vulva), Pruritis vulva, Dysfunctional uterine bleeding, Intestinal colic/tenesmus and Boils of thigh.
7.	Qatn	Carbuncle, Scabies and Furunculosis of gluteal region. Gout, Haemorrhoids, Filariasis and Pruritus on back. 6, 11-13, 17, 23, 26, 36.
8.	Us'us	Haemorrhoids, wounds of lower part of body, Bleeding per rectum, Proctitis, Haematuria, Hararat-ul-Kulyatain, Burning micturation, Oophritis, Uterine prolapse and Pruritus vulva.
9.	Maq'ad	Proctitis, Haemorrhoids, Scabies of anal region, intestinal colic and Amenorrhoea.
10.	Uznain	Pain and heaviness of eyelids, Headache and Heaviness of head.
11.	Kahil	Asthma, Dyspnoea, Cough, Congestion, Diseases of thorax, Diphtheria, Sore throat and Shoulder pain.
12.	Mankibain/Katifa'in	Palpitation, poisoning and rib fracture. Hepatalgia and other diseases of liver (Right Mankib). Pain of spleen and Quotidian fever at Left Mankib.
13.	Taht-al-Sadyain/ Baynus- Sadyain	Metrorrhagea or menorrhagia.
14.	Rusgh-ul-Yadain	Chronic Scabies, Pruritus, Favus and Shiqaq fil-Yad (cracked palm). 6-9, 13, 17, 31.
15.	Naghiz	Hepatalgia and hepatitis (Right Naghiz). Pain of spleen, splenitis and poisoning (Left Naghiz) 6-8, 13
16.	Fakhzain	Orchitis, Metritis, Furunculosis, infected wounds and Carbuncles of thighs and shanks, Amenorrhoea, Gout, Elephantiasis, lumbar pruritus, Arthritis.
17.	Rukbah	Swelling and Arthritis of knee. Abscess and chronic wounds of the leg and shank.
18.	Saqain	Chronic renal and uterine colic, boils and carbuncles, Amenorrhoea, pain in the throat, Diphtheria, Herpes of shank, disorders of kidneys, wounds of bladder, Melancholia, Apoplexy, Epilepsy, Halitosis, Scabies and Pruritus, Sciatica, Loss of vision and Fever. 6-18, 20-21, 23-28, 31, 36-37.
19.	Urqubain	All those diseases in which Hijamat-e-Saqain is useful.
20.	Ka'bain	Amenorrhoea, Sciatica and Gout.
21.	Batn-wa-Teht-us-Sirah	Hijamah on abdomen- Carbuncle and Furunculosis of thighs, Haemorrhoids, Gout, Elephantiasis; on right and left hypochondrium for epistaxis from respective right and left nostrils.

Conclusion

Authors found that Hijamah or cupping therapy is an important emerging alternative non-pharmacological regimenal mode of treatment. Hijamah is beneficial in a large number of disorders. Cupping Therapy has successfully been used as an effective therapy for various medical conditions like blood disorders, arthritic and muscular disorders, fertility and gynaecological disorders, skin problems (eczema, acne etc.) as well as improving general physical and psychological well-being. Research has shown the clinical effectiveness of cupping for both physical and psychological conditions.

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