Effects of Traditional Cupping Therapy in Patients With Carpal Tunnel Syndrome: A Randomized Controlled Trial

Abstract

We investigated the effectiveness of cupping, a traditional method of treating musculoskeletal pain, in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) in an open randomized trial.

n = 52 outpatients (58.5 ± 8.0 years) with neurologically confirmed CTS were randomly assigned to either a verum (n = 26) or a control group (n = 26).

Verum patients were treated with a single application of wet cupping, and control patients with a single local application of heat within the region overlying the trapezius muscle.

Patients were followed up on day 7 after treatment.

The primary outcome, severity of CTS symptoms (VAS), was reduced from 61.5 ± 20.5 to 24.6 ± 22.7mm at day 7 in the cupping group and from 67.1 ± 20.2 to 51.7 ± 23.9mm in the control group

Significant treatment effects were also found for the Levine CTS-score (−.6 pts; 95%CI −.9; -.2, P = .002), neck pain (-12.6mm; 95%CI −18.8; −6.4, P < .001), functional disability (DASH-Score) (−11.1 pts; 95%CI −17.1; −5.1, P < .001), and physical quality of life (.3; 95%CI .0; .3, P = .048).

The treatment was safe and well tolerated.

We conclude that cupping therapy may be effective in relieving the pain and other symptoms related to CTS. The efficacy of cupping in the long-term management of CTS and related mechanisms remains to be clarified.

Perspective

The results of a randomized trial on the clinical effects of traditional cupping therapy in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome are presented. Cupping of segmentally related shoulder zones appears to alleviate the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome.