

The use of cupping as a therapy for post stroke



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Stroke is the third most common cause of death in the developed world after cancer and heart disease, and is the most common cause of severe physical disability. The incidence of stroke rises steeply with age, and in many developed countries there is increasing risk because of the adoption of less healthy lifestyles. At least half of stroke survivors are left with some physical disability.

According to Tibb philosophy, Stroke is classified as a condition resulting from a Cold and Dry imbalance. The excess of cold and dryness is what leads to inadequate blood supply to the brain in 85% of patients. Ultimately this may cause a clot formation in the blood vessels that feed the brain.

There are many known factors that may increase your risk of a stroke. A number of these factors are associated with an increase in the melancholic humour or Cold and Dry qualities.

People 55 or older: With age, there is an increase in the body's level of dryness and heat diminishes. The elderly are thus more susceptible to developing atherosclerotic plaques and hardening of blood vessels.

High blood pressure and diabetes: It is well known that people with primary or essential hypertension (i.e. hypertension without a known cause) and type II diabetes are at higher risk of stroke.

High cholesterol - According to Tibb, high cholesterol is also a cold and dry condition and contributes to the development of plaques in the blood vessels, thereby increasing the risk of a stroke.

Cigarette smoking or exposure to secondhand smoke. Smoking increases dryness within the body, and thereby increases the risk factors associated with strokes.

Although stroke is a disease of the brain, it can affect the entire body. A common disability that results from stroke is paralysis to one side of the body, called hemiplegia. A related disability that is not as debilitating as paralysis is one-sided weakness or hemiparesis. Stroke induced paralysis or weakness may affect only the face, an arm, or a leg or one entire side of the body and face. Furthermore, stroke may cause problems with thought processes, awareness, attention, learning, judgment, and memory.

If the cognitive problems are severe, the stroke patient may be said to have apraxia, agnosia, or 'neglect'. Simply put, 'neglect' means that a stroke patient has no knowledge of one side of his or her body, or one side of the visual field, and is unaware of the deficit. A stroke patient may be unaware of his or her surroundings, or may be unaware of the mental deficits that resulted from the stroke. Stroke victims often have problems understanding or forming speech. These language problems usually result from damage to the left temporal and parietal lobes of the brain.

Many stroke patients experience pain, uncomfortable numbness, or strange sensations after a stroke. These sensations may be multi-factorial and include damage to the sensory regions of the brain, stiff joints, or a disabled limb. Pain is often described as a mixture of sensations, including heat and cold, burning, tingling, numbness, sharp stabbing and underlying aching pain. The pain is often worse in the hands and feet and is further aggravated by movement and temperature changes, especially cold.

Cupping is often used for stroke rehabilitation in Asian countries. Tibb uses cupping with positive outcomes for patients who have suffered a stroke. Cupping therapy stimulates the organs directly under the site being cupped. It serves to regulate the function of organs by assisting in the elimination of waste products. In the incidence of post stroke disability, the elimination of excess and abnormal toxins are removed by way of bringing these toxins up to the surface of the skin. These toxins are then eliminated naturally through the skin surface or via small, superficial incisions made with a surgical blade or lancet device. Cupping is generally performed directly over the affected site with the exception of the face.

Cupping relieves brain swelling post-stroke by supplying the area with circulating blood that in turn relieves congestion and stagnation. Cupping further stimulates the meridians, which is the energy system used in acupuncture. This means that specific points have a healing effect distant to the site being cupped. Cupping is also said to release endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. These endorphins are released in response to the tight vacuum action of the cups on the skin or the superficial incisions created in blood cupping (or wet cupping).

Cupping is not used as an isolated therapy in the treatment of post stroke disability. Tibb practitioners adopt a holistic approach advising on all facets of lifestyle including diet, exercise and emotional health. The Tibb approach is an integrative one, which aims to utilize all available health resources, including western allopathic as well as complementary systems for the betterment and maintenance of health.

Dr. Joy Saville, is a Tibb practitioner specializing in family health and has recently set up practice in Parktown North, Johannesburg. For more information or for appointments, kindly call 010 203 9364 / 079 609 228 or visit the Tibb website www.tibb.co.za