

## Hold the Needles: New Anti-Aging Treatments

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With healthy, noninvasive cosmetic techniques on the rise, Chinese medicine has an opportunity to shine. Chinese medicine offers a variety of treatments and therapies that will not only have great cosmetic results, but will improve the general health of the patient without using needles. The caveat: use of all techniques or therapies is based on the practitioner's skill to make a correct diagnosis and differentiation.

Historically, cupping has been used to treat a variety of health conditions most notably back pain, but it can also be very effective in treating health conditions like asthma or constipation. There are a number of cupping "techniques" that vary by how much suction is used - static versus moving cupping, cupping with needles or moxa, and even bleeding cupping. The type of cupping that I use to effectively treat cellulite is called moving, sliding, or massage cupping. Cellulite is dampness (fat) that has pushed itself up against the fibers of connective tissue leading to the skin looking dimpled or lumpy. Most women, and some men, have some degree of cellulite somewhere on their body. As we age, our skin loses collagen and elastin so it slackens; cellulite's appearance can then be more prominent.

The fact that cellulite needs to be treated from both the inside and the outside makes it a perfect condition to treat for Chinese medicine practitioners. Naturally, a proper diet and adequate exercise are recommendations for those who would like to control cellulite. There are also many products that are externally applied that claim to treat cellulite.

However, topical treatment with such creams is often ineffective, but products that moisturize the area and increase blood flow generally have the potential to be somewhat effective. The beauty of using cupping to treat the appearance of cellulite is that it works using the same principles upon which techniques like enermologie are based. Mechanical stimulation can change the quality of the skin, help metabolize fat, and improve blood flow. Cupping is certainly a safe, healthy alternative to procedures like liposuction.

*Tuina* massage is another therapy that can be used to treat the appearance of cellulite. Like cupping, *tuina* will improve general health and improve immune function as you are treating a "cosmetic" condition. *Tuina* can stimulate acupuncture points in the targeted area thereby improving *qi* flow and blood circulation while loosening tight fascia - in this case we would be aiming for the subcutaneous layers of skin where the fat is trapped and making the skin look dimpled. *Gua sha* is another ancient therapy in our tool box. *Gua sha* promotes the flow of *qi* and blood and moves fluids; it helps normalize metabolic functions that can benefit the release of the fat that causes the appearance of cellulite. It will pull stagnant phlegm to the surface and allow healthier fluids to circulate and help rejuvenate the area.

Besides these three non-needling techniques, another therapy that can be used to help reduce cellulite is by teaching our patients about the medicinal properties of food. There are certain foods that people should avoid to help reduce the production of the fat pockets that equal cellulite. Sweets or sugars are notorious for creating phlegm/dampness in the body. Plus, too many sweets

(or too much sugar) puts stress on the kidneys leading to toxic buildup in the body. Salt or sodium should also be avoided since cellulite (fat) has high water content, it is beneficial to reduce one's intake of salt.

Naturally, greasy or fried foods can form dampness as will dairy products, alcohol, and cold foods. In addition to restricting dairy and alcohol, I also give patients advice about somewhat restricting their intake of coffee or other foods with caffeine since they can deplete *yin*, damage digestion, and subsequently lead to the production of damp. Foods that help reduce phlegm/damp include pears, brown rice, radishes, clams, adzuki beans, pumpkin, oats, and seaweed to name a few.

One theory about cellulite is that detoxing the interior will help reduce the fat that is leading to its appearance. Detoxing with food is, in my opinion, is a safe gentle way to go about it. Some foods that can support the body's detoxing process include bananas (but not too many because they can cause dampness), cucumbers, dates and figs, honey, sesame oil, and red beans.

Eating skin-friendly foods is an important part of the reduction of cellulite; keeping the skin moist and supple can help reduce its appearance. Since sun damage is one of the main causes of collagen break down, foods that are high in antioxidants are beneficial. These include red or dark colored fruits like blueberries or plums and strawberries. Berries are also good sources for vitamins C and E because they are basic components of good cell health. Tomatoes, cantaloupe, and sweet potatoes are also high in antioxidants. Carrots, spinach, and broccoli are all good sources of vitamin A that helps our skin cells turnover more quickly.

Any foods that are rich in vitamin A help fight the free radical damage that ages skin prematurely. EFAs (essential fatty acids) are another essential ingredient for well-moisturized, supple skin - remember, dry skin can make cellulite appear to look worse. They also keep our skin cell membranes healthy which in turn helps the cells stay hydrated. Good sources of EFAs include salmon and flax seed or flax seed oil. Some people choose to take a fish oil/flax seed oil combination capsule to get benefit from both fish and flax oils. Green tea has also been demonstrated to have a positive aspect on the condition of the skin because of its anti-inflammatory properties in addition to containing antioxidants and a variety of vitamins and minerals. Finally, there's water. Recommendations about how much water we need to drink vary with medical traditions. However, there is no argument that hydrated skin is more plump and looks healthier than dry skin. Plus, you give your skin an extra boost if you drink mineral water.

The main thing to remember is that first and foremost we must consider the general health of the patient. Not every patient who wants a cosmetic treatment is a good candidate for it. Some need basic energetic reorganization, tonification, or other therapy before it is appropriate to do "cosmetic" work. For even though cupping, *gua sha*, and *tuina* can improve a patient's general health, their use as cosmetic techniques needs to be done at an appropriate healthful stage in the patient's life.

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