



TECHNIQUES & TOOLS

Ontake Warm Bamboo: A Valuable Tool for Your Acupuncture Practice

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Ontake warm bamboo is a moxibustion technique with two additional components: pressure and rhythm. A short piece of bamboo is filled with moxa wool. When the moxa is ignited, the bamboo gets hot and can be held, tapped, pressed or rolled along the acupuncture channels. Additionally, using a metronome, these techniques can be applied rhythmically at specific frequencies of beats per minute.

Ontake functions in the same way as a traditional moxa box, except it's far smaller and much more mobile. In contrast to a moxa box or a moxa stick, it can be rolled on the skin and pressed deep into the soft tissue. It fits comfortably in your hand and can be tapped or rolled rhythmically over any part of the body, including the face. It allows you to be agile and flexible, treating small or broad areas quickly; and crucially, patients love the experience, which is pleasant and calming.



Make a long bamboo tube about 4 cm long, without a joint. The thickness of the bamboo tube wall should be about 3-4 mm. Fill it with semi-pure moxa, leaving a space at both ends of the bamboo. — Makoto Yamashita¹

Any part of the bamboo can be applied to the skin. You can roll with it, knock percussively with the side, tap the lighted end briefly on the skin or press deeply into articulations with the lip. Even without any theory or training, applying heated bamboo to a painful area can get results.

Clinical Applications

Ontake has been around for a short time in Japan, perhaps since the 1960s, and historically it was used as a local branch tool. So, for example, if there was tightness or pain at the shoulder, it was applied there. In the past 10 years, however, its uses and applications have grown more sophisticated, and it can be applied with a growing number of theoretical models.



Meridian Frequencies and Manaka's Wooden Hammer and Needle

Rhythmic percussion of the meridians has been a tradition in Japanese acupuncture going back to the Mubunryu style in the late 1500s, when blunt gold and silver needles were lightly tapped with a wooden mallet on reactive points on the abdomen.² In the late 20th century, Yoshio Manaka, a renowned Japanese doctor, acupuncturist and researcher, developed percussive tapping treatments using a wooden hammer and needle.³



He then researched specific tapping frequencies of beats per minute for each acupuncture channel. These frequencies advanced the efficacy and range of his methods considerably, and his meridian frequencies became an important part of his routines:

- 104: Midline channels (*ren* and *du mai*)
- 108: Large intestine and liver
- 112: Bladder
- 120: Gallbladder, small intestine, kidneys
- 126: Heart, lung
- 132: Stomach, spleen
- 152: *Sanjiao*
- 176: Pericardium

Ontake treatment has also proved effective when applied at the meridian frequencies. When heat is applied in this way, there are rapid changes in soft-tissue tension, exceeding the effectiveness of the wooden hammer and needle in quite unexpected ways.

Branch Treatments and Sore Throat

Ontake is a versatile tool for treating symptoms, especially when using *yin* and *yang* principles of opposites. For example, when applied on the sacrum, it is effective for sore throat. The throat is superior and anterior, and the sacrum is inferior and posterior. If the sore throat is central, roll the Ontake on the midline of the sacrum at 104 bpm (*du mai*). If the sore throat is on the left, roll the Ontake more on the right of the sacrum at 112 bpm (bladder), and vice versa. This treatment exploits the relationships between the kidney and bladder channels, and the *ren* and *du mai* vessels.

Root Treatments

There is a tradition in Japanese acupuncture, and especially in moxibustion, of generalized treatments that do not depend on the identification of patterns such as, for example, kidney deficiency or liver excess. Perhaps the most famous of these in moxibustion is the Sawada protocol, "a formula of points that could be used on all patients, regardless of complaint or condition. This formula fortified the patient's constitution and strengthened the *qi* and the defensive and healing energies."⁴

Ontake can be used in the same way, focusing on the *yangming* channels of the arm and leg, and the bladder channel on the back. This sequence is a powerful whole-body root treatment that stimulates healing responses without focusing on patterns or symptoms.⁵

Pain Relief

The late Dr. Richard Tan was well-known for relieving pain rapidly using channel pairings and different holographic models. His approach can be adapted to Ontake: identifying the sick channel, finding a dynamic paired channel, and rolling or tapping with bamboo on the paired channel using Tan's holographic mappings to inform the location. Ontake has the advantage of being needle-free, and the heat creates dynamic and long-lasting changes, arguably more effective than needling.⁶

Hirata Zones and Dermatome Moxibustion

Hot needle therapy (*Nesshin Kairyō Jutsu*) was a Japanese holographic system of treatment. It was developed by Kurakichi Hirata (1901–1945), who developed a unique dermatome moxibustion system using a heated probe. Ontake is a safe and effective substitute for the probes, breathing new life into this remarkable method and empowering patients to continue treatment at home.⁷

Ontake warm bamboo is a simple and elegant moxa device, cheap to buy and easy to make yourself. It can be adapted to any clinical practice that uses the meridian system, and it can be used with a variety of theoretical models. Finally, it can empower patients to self-treat safely.

References

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