



SHANDE TCM

Cupping, Gua Sha & Other TCM Therapies

What to expect, how to stay comfortable and where safety limits matter

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How to use this guide

This guide groups related everyday concerns so you can ask better questions, observe changes that actually matter and know when ordinary self-care may be reasonable versus when conventional medical assessment should come first. TCM terminology is kept in its traditional context rather than presented as biomedical diagnosis.

Safety principle

Severe, persistent, rapidly worsening symptoms or clear red flags should be medically assessed first. Call 995 for life-threatening emergencies.

CHAPTER 01

Cupping Therapy: What to Expect, Bruising, Hygiene and Safety

A practical guide to cupping marks, comfort, hygiene, medical cautions and how to decide whether cupping is appropriate for you.



Key points

- Cupping commonly leaves temporary circular marks; darker marks do not prove that “toxins” have been removed.
- Broken skin, active infection, significant bleeding risk and some medical conditions need extra caution.
- A clean, explained procedure and realistic treatment goals matter more than how dramatic the marks look.

What cupping actually involves

Cupping uses a cup to create suction on the skin. Depending on the technique, cups may stay in one place or move over a lubricated area. People often describe pulling, tightness or warmth. It should not feel like uncontrolled sharp pain, burning or numbness.

Marks are expected, but they are not a diagnosis

Temporary red or purple circular marks can appear where suction was applied. Their colour can vary with pressure, duration, skin tone and individual response. A darker mark should not be presented as a measurement of “toxins”, blood quality or disease severity.

Hygiene and skin condition matter

Tell the practitioner about rashes, wounds, recent surgery, fragile skin, blood-thinning medicines, bleeding disorders and significant medical conditions. Cups and any reusable equipment should be handled hygienically, and treatment should avoid broken or infected skin.

Ask how strong and how long

More suction is not automatically better. A sensible session should match your comfort, skin condition and treatment goal. If you feel faint, unusually unwell, severe pain, burning or shortness of breath, tell the practitioner immediately.

Aftercare can stay simple

Keep the treated area comfortable and avoid irritating already-sensitive skin. Most marks fade gradually. Seek medical advice if there is blistering, spreading redness, significant swelling, pus, fever, severe pain or another reaction that does not look like an ordinary temporary mark.

Judge progress by the original problem

If cupping is being used for muscle discomfort, the useful question is whether movement, sleep or daily function improves - not whether the marks become darker. If symptoms are persistent, worsening or associated with weakness, numbness, injury, fever or other warning signs, medical assessment comes first.

CHAPTER 02

Gua Sha: Redness, Bruising, Pressure and Safer Use

A sensible guide to gua sha pressure, expected skin changes, hygiene, who needs extra caution and why more bruising is not better.

Key points

- Temporary redness or petechiae can occur, but heavy bruising is not the goal.
- Avoid scraping over broken skin, active rashes, infection or areas with unusual swelling.
- People with bleeding risk, frail skin or significant medical conditions should discuss suitability first.

What gua sha does at the skin surface

Gua sha uses a smooth-edged tool with repeated strokes over lubricated skin. Pressure varies. The technique can create temporary redness or small pinpoint marks because superficial tissues and tiny blood vessels are being mechanically stressed.

“More red” does not mean “more effective”

A dramatic colour change is easy to see but is not a reliable measure of treatment quality. Excessive pressure can increase soreness and bruising without adding useful benefit. The appropriate intensity is the one that fits the person and the reason for treatment.

Areas that should be avoided

Do not scrape directly over open wounds, active skin infection, fresh surgical sites, severe rash, unexplained lumps or areas where there is significant pain or swelling that has not been assessed. Extra caution is sensible over thin or fragile skin.

Medicines and bleeding risk matter

Tell the practitioner if you use anticoagulant or antiplatelet medicines, have a bleeding disorder, bruise very easily or have a condition that affects skin healing. Do not stop prescribed medicines simply to receive gua sha.

Aftercare and monitoring

Mild tenderness or visible marks should settle. Avoid repeatedly working the same irritated area. Seek medical review if pain becomes severe, swelling increases, the skin breaks down, there are signs of infection, or you feel unwell after treatment.

Use function, not marks, to judge value

If gua sha is being used for muscle tension, track whether movement, comfort or function changes over a reasonable period. If the underlying problem is not improving, keep asking whether a different assessment or treatment approach is needed.

CHAPTER 03

Moxibustion & Heat Therapy: Comfort, Ventilation and Safety

How moxibustion uses heat, what to tell your practitioner and why skin sensation and ventilation matter.



Moxibustion is a heat-based therapy

Moxibustion traditionally uses processed mugwort to provide heat near selected areas. The practical safety questions are straightforward: how close the heat is, whether the person can feel it normally, how long exposure lasts and whether the room is appropriately ventilated.

Reduced sensation changes the risk

Diabetes with neuropathy, nerve injury, very fragile skin, reduced consciousness and certain circulatory problems can make burns harder to notice. Tell the practitioner if you have altered sensation or a history of poor wound healing.

Heat should feel controlled, not threatening

Warmth may be expected; burning, stinging or intolerable heat is not something to endure. Speak up early. The treatment can be moved, stopped or adjusted before skin injury occurs.

Smoke and ventilation deserve practical attention

Traditional moxa can produce smoke and odour. People with asthma, respiratory sensitivity or strong smoke intolerance should discuss this in advance. Smokeless alternatives or other approaches may be considered depending on the situation.

After treatment, inspect the skin

Mild warmth or temporary redness may occur. Blistering, persistent pain, marked swelling or skin damage should be assessed. Do not apply additional heat to an area that already feels irritated.

Not every symptom needs another therapy added

Moxibustion should have a clear reason for being included. It is reasonable to ask what it is intended to support, what precautions matter and how the practitioner will decide whether it is useful.

CHAPTER 04

Acupressure at Home: A Simple Safety Guide Before You Try It

A straightforward overview of preparation, common sensations, hygiene and when to tell your practitioner about medical conditions.

Key points

- Home acupressure should be gentle and should not cause sharp, severe or worsening pain.
- Avoid pressing injured, infected, swollen or otherwise concerning areas without appropriate advice.
- Pregnancy, serious illness or unexplained symptoms are reasons to ask a qualified professional before relying on self-treatment.

Keep the goal modest

Home acupressure is best treated as a comfort or relaxation practice, not a way to diagnose or cure disease. If a point feels pleasant or mildly tender, gentle pressure may be reasonable. If it causes sharp pain, numbness, dizziness or worsening symptoms, stop.

Do not press everything that hurts

Pain can signal injury or illness. Avoid pressing directly on broken skin, obvious infection, fresh injury, significant swelling, a suspected fracture, a lump you do not understand or an area where a doctor has told you to avoid pressure.

Technique can stay simple

Use clean hands, a comfortable position and light-to-moderate pressure. Breathe normally and keep sessions short. More pressure is not automatically better. If you are copying a point from a diagram, remember that body proportions vary and a picture cannot replace an in-person assessment.

Special situations deserve extra caution

Pregnancy, bleeding disorders, blood-thinning medicines, severe osteoporosis, recent surgery and significant medical conditions can change what is appropriate. Ask a qualified healthcare professional or registered TCM practitioner before using techniques that might affect a vulnerable area.

Know when self-care is not enough

Do not use acupressure to delay evaluation of chest pain, severe breathlessness, fainting, sudden weakness, significant injury, severe abdominal pain or rapidly worsening symptoms. For emergencies in Singapore, call 995.

Ask for plain-language explanations

If a TCM term is unfamiliar, ask what it means in everyday language and whether it corresponds to a biomedical diagnosis or is only a traditional pattern description. Also ask about expected benefits, uncertainty, safety, interactions with medicines and when conventional medical care should take priority. Clear explanations are part of good care.

Use the “what, why, how long” rule

For any proposed TCM approach, ask three questions: What exactly are we doing? Why is it being suggested for me? How long should we try it before reviewing whether it is worthwhile? Add a fourth question when medicines or medical conditions are involved: What safety or interaction issues should I know about? These questions make care easier to understand without requiring you to become an expert in TCM terminology.

CHAPTER 05

Tuina Session Safety: Pressure, Comfort and When to Speak Up

A practical guide to what Tuina may involve, how pressure should be handled and when manual treatment may not be appropriate.



Tuina is not simply “the stronger the better”

Tuina may include pressing, rolling, kneading, mobilisation and other manual techniques. Intensity should be adapted to the person, the body area and the clinical situation. Strong pain during treatment is not proof that the treatment is effective.

Tell the practitioner about injuries and medical conditions first

Recent fractures, significant swelling, suspected blood clots, severe osteoporosis, neurological symptoms, recent surgery, skin infection and certain pregnancy-related situations can change what is appropriate. Bring relevant reports if you are already under specialist care.

Use a simple comfort scale

A useful session can involve pressure or temporary discomfort, but it should remain controllable. If you are holding your breath, tensing hard, feeling numbness, dizziness or sharp pain, say so immediately so the technique can be adjusted.

After the session, judge function rather than soreness

Temporary muscle tenderness can happen. More useful questions are whether movement, sleep or daily function improves over time. New weakness, numbness, significant swelling or rapidly worsening pain deserves medical assessment rather than repeated stronger massage.

A treatment plan needs a review point

If Tuina is being used for recurring pain, agree on what will be reviewed after several sessions. Continuing indefinitely without checking function, diagnosis or progress is not a complete plan.

Manual therapy should complement, not replace, necessary diagnosis

Pain after trauma, unexplained neurological symptoms, fever with severe pain, loss of bladder or bowel control and other red flags require conventional medical evaluation. Tuina should not delay that process.

CHAPTER 06

Acupuncture Preparation & Aftercare: A Practical Patient Guide

What to tell your practitioner, how to prepare, what sensations may be normal and what should prompt a review.

Before the appointment: bring the facts that change safety

Tell the practitioner about pregnancy, blood-thinning medicines, bleeding disorders, implanted electrical devices, fainting history, reduced skin sensation, immune problems and major diagnoses. Bring an updated medicine and supplement list rather than relying on memory.

Eat and hydrate normally unless you were given individual instructions

Arriving very hungry, dehydrated, intoxicated or exhausted can make a session less comfortable. A normal light meal and usual hydration are generally more sensible than elaborate pre-treatment rituals. Wear clothing that allows reasonable access to the area being discussed.

During treatment: communication matters more than endurance

Acupuncture sensations vary. Dull pressure, heaviness or brief tingling can occur, but sharp, burning, electric or intolerable pain should be reported immediately. A practitioner can adjust or remove a needle; severe discomfort is not something a patient must “push through”.

Aftercare is usually simple

Most people can return to ordinary activities unless they have been given specific advice. Get up slowly, hydrate normally and notice how you feel. Mild local tenderness or a small bruise can occur, but unexpected or worsening symptoms should be discussed with the clinic or medically assessed when appropriate.

Know the purpose and the review point

Before committing to an open-ended course, define what improvement would look like: fewer pain days, easier movement, better sleep or improved function. Ask when the plan will be reviewed and what would lead to a change in approach.

Urgent symptoms do not belong in an acupuncture queue

Chest pain, severe breathlessness, new weakness, sudden severe headache, major injury or rapidly worsening symptoms require appropriate conventional medical care. Complementary treatment should not delay emergency assessment.

CHAPTER 07

TCM and Conventional Medical Care: Using Both Responsibly

A safety-first guide to communication between healthcare providers and situations that require urgent conventional medical attention.



Tell each provider what you are using

Good communication reduces avoidable risks. Tell your TCM practitioner about your medical diagnoses, prescriptions and hospital care, and tell your doctor or pharmacist about herbs, supplements and TCM products.

Do not stop prescribed treatment on your own

If you are considering changing a prescription medicine, discuss it with the clinician who prescribed it. Stopping some medicines suddenly can be dangerous.

Keep records

A simple list of medicines, supplements, allergies and recent tests makes it easier for different providers to understand your care.

Recognise emergencies

TCM clinics are not emergency departments. For severe or sudden symptoms, difficulty breathing, major bleeding, stroke-like symptoms or loss of consciousness, call 995 or seek urgent conventional care.

You do not have to choose one side

Many people use TCM while also seeing a GP, specialist, physiotherapist or other healthcare professional. The safest approach is transparency. Tell each provider what medicines, herbs, supplements and treatments you are using. This allows interactions, duplicated treatment and conflicting advice to be considered rather than hidden.

Different systems answer different questions

A TCM pattern description and a biomedical diagnosis are not interchangeable. One may be used to organise treatment within the TCM framework, while the other may rely on examination, imaging, laboratory tests or established diagnostic criteria. Keeping those roles clear reduces confusion and prevents traditional terminology from being mistaken for proof of organ disease.

Urgent care is not a competition

Chest pain, severe breathing difficulty, stroke-like symptoms, major trauma, uncontrolled bleeding, loss of consciousness and other emergencies need immediate conventional medical care. Complementary treatment can be reconsidered after urgent problems are stabilised. Responsible TCM should never require delaying emergency assessment.

Give both sides the same medication list

One of the simplest safety habits is to keep a current list of prescription medicines, non-prescription products, vitamins, supplements and Chinese medicines. Show the same list to your doctor and TCM practitioner when relevant. This reduces the chance that each provider is working with only half the information.

Test results do not lose importance because you use TCM

Blood tests, imaging and specialist diagnoses can answer questions that traditional pattern assessment cannot. If a doctor has identified diabetes, anaemia, a fracture, infection or another condition, do not replace that information with a TCM label. Traditional care may still be discussed as complementary support, but the established diagnosis remains important for safety and planning.

Chronic disease needs coordination, not secrecy

People with high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney or liver disease, cancer, heart disease and other chronic conditions may still be interested in TCM. The safest approach is coordinated disclosure. Some herbs, supplements or changes in diet may affect medicines or laboratory results, so your treating medical team should know what you are using.

Do not stop prescribed medicine because of a broad promise

Be cautious if anyone tells you to stop essential medicine immediately because a complementary treatment can “replace” it, especially without speaking to the prescriber. Changes to long-term medication often need monitoring and should be made with the healthcare professional responsible for that treatment.

The best integration is practical

Integrated care does not require both systems to agree on every theory. It requires each to stay within its strengths, communicate clearly and avoid delaying necessary care. A patient should be able to use TCM for appropriate goals while still receiving vaccinations, screening, emergency care, surgery, medicines or rehabilitation when those are needed.

Preventive care still matters

Using TCM does not remove the value of vaccination, cancer screening, blood pressure checks, diabetes monitoring, dental care or other preventive services appropriate for your age and risk. Complementary care works best when it sits beside, rather than replaces, routine prevention and evidence-based follow-up for known conditions.

Transitions are the moments to communicate again

Hospital discharge, surgery, a new specialist, pregnancy, a new diagnosis or a major medicine change are good times to update every practitioner involved. Information that was safe six months ago may no longer be enough. Repeating your current medicine and supplement list during these transitions can prevent avoidable misunderstandings.

Practical checklist

Is the problem getting worse or clearly affecting daily function?

Are there breathing, consciousness, bleeding, dehydration or neurological red flags that should come first?

What prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, supplements or TCM products are already being used?

If an approach is tried, when will progress be reviewed?

What change would mean self-care should stop and professional assessment should come first?

References & further reading

Health Sciences Authority (HSA): Chinese proprietary medicines and complementary health product safety. Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF): Emergency Medical Services and guidance on when to call 995.