

BEAUTY Counter *blog*

THE DOCTOR IS IN

How to Spoon-feed Your Body, Literally

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This column features tips and advice from a revolving cast of industry leaders, on hand to discuss your beauty dilemmas, from blemishes to Botox. To submit a question, email celia_ellenberg@condenast.com.

The world of Eastern medicine and healing techniques can be vast, to say the least. While you may already be well versed in acupuncture and cupping, what about gua sha? Dr. Vanda Huang breaks down the how's and why's of this popular Chinese healing method.

So, what exactly is gua sha?

A healing technique and home remedy in various Asian cultures, gua sha is very effective for what is known in Chinese medicine as "blood stagnation," which can be a result of chronic pain, fatigue, fever, and other diseases involving poor circulation, such as upper respiratory problems.

The technique involves a smooth-edged instrument, typically a porcelain spoon, being rubbed over a body surface with pressure to increase circulation in the area and break up blood stagnation. In Chinese, gua means "to scrape" while sha refers to the reddish, rashlike mark that appears on the skin after gua sha is applied.

Where is it applied to the body?

Typically gua sha is done on the neck, shoulders, or back, but it can be performed on any surface of the body aside from bony or sensitive areas. A salve or oil is applied first, and then a firm stroking motion is employed along the muscle to stimulate circulation. Once the sha, or some degree of redness, appears, the method is stopped and then repeated a few days later. Eventually the patient reaches a point where after a treatment, redness no longer arises since all the blood stagnation has been successfully cleared out.

Does the skin turn different colors?

The skin can turn anywhere from light pink to red to dark purple after gua sha. The color of the mark indicates the degree of severity of the blood stagnation. Lighter red is milder, while dark purple is more severe. Though the marks may look like bruises, they are not—gua sha does not damage or traumatize the blood vessels, just disrupts them in a therapeutic way. They will fade, depending on the color, within two to seven days.

What are some of the benefits of gua sha?

The two most common ones are pain relief and fever reduction. It's great for neck and back pain, and especially the neck and shoulder stiffness that is a common result of chronic stress. It is also frequently used over specific areas in the upper back to help reduce high fevers, especially in children. Since gua sha improves circulation, it can help conditions like severe headaches, arthritis, PMS, and bronchitis, and it's also great for overall well-being.

Dr. Vanda Huang is an acupuncturist and expert in naturopathic medicine. For more information on her practice or to book an appointment, go to www.flowinghealth.org.

—Fiorella Valdesolo

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