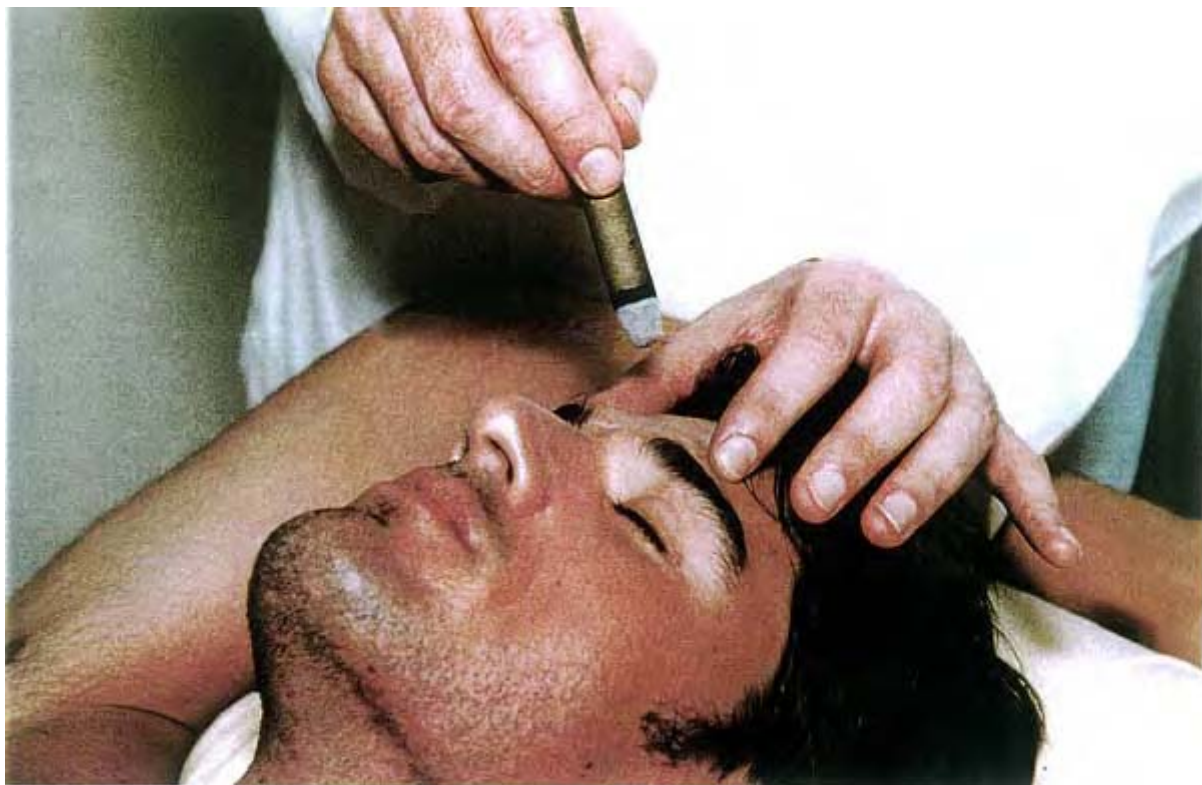




Moxibustion

by Ray Ford

This Chinese healing technique, usually used together with acupuncture, is effective for treating many ailments including asthma, arthritis, allergies, menstrual problems and can even correct the position of a breech baby!



Using moxa stick to help alleviate symptoms of allergy and sinusitis

Using heat to relieve pain and discomfort in the body is one of the oldest types of treatment invented by humanity, and it is still widely used today in many different forms of medicine.

Moxibustion, which involves heating the body with a burning herb, is an integral part of Chinese medicine. Acupuncture is known in China as Zhen-Jiu (needle moxa): this term is an indication of the close relationship between the two methods of treatment. The term moxibustion is taken from the Japanese phrase, moe kusa, which means burning herb.



Artemisia Vulgaris

In China, there is evidence of early cauterisation techniques; heated stones (Bian stones) were applied in combination with needling procedures up to 10,000 years ago. Various other materials have been used to apply heat, including dry leaves, twigs, charcoal and sulphur. The dried leaves of *Artemisia Vulgaris* (Mugwort, Chinese Wormwood) became the most popular because of its widespread proliferation in China and because it burns readily with a constant heat.

Modern research into the effects of moxa, especially in Japan, shows that the immune system can be significantly enhanced by moxibustion therapy. There is some debate about whether just the heating of acu-points enhances the immune system, or if the burning herb contains properties which enliven the healing mechanisms of the body.

Although there are many ways to use moxibustion, in Australia the most commonly used is called indirect moxibustion. This involves warming acu-points or larger areas of the body with a moxa preparation, which is sometimes used in combination with acupuncture. The moxa preparation can be made up of dried leaves of *Artemisia vulgaris* made into small cones or larger moxa sticks or, as is common in Japan, loose wood moxa.



Using a moxa stick to create heat at specific parts of the body

Moxa sticks are convenient in a clinic and are used widely in Australia. Once alight, the stick burns slowly at an even temperature and is used by the practitioner to create heat or warmth at points on the body, according to the disorder being treated. The client tells the practitioner when the heat is becoming too strong: the practitioner will then move the stick away for a couple of seconds before warming the area again. This process can be repeated until the desired effect has been obtained.

When the client is comfortable with this technique it becomes extremely relaxing: they can often feel heat deep inside the body, even though only a mild heat is being applied to the skin. Some clients feel tingling up and down the body, or significant movement of energy within them, and most clients enjoy a feeling of calmness and warmth.

The stimulation of acu-points using heat not only creates a relaxing feeling but also increases blood supply to an area. This can clear blockages within meridians, drive cold energies out of the body and promote a deeper relaxation of vessels and muscles which allows the body's natural healing mechanisms to flourish.



Using moxa wool to strengthen liver function and enhance the immune system.

Practitioners can also use moxa wool, which is rolled into very small ‘rice-grain’ size pieces, placed onto acupoints, then lit. As it burns down quite quickly, the practitioner removes the burning moxa just before it touches the skin. The procedure is repeated several times. This technique is very effective in practice because the moxa is focused on a particular point rather than a general area. It can stimulate a specific acupuncture point or meridian, helping to re-balance energy, and is effective for activating blocked or stagnant energy in the body.



Using a moxa box. The temperature is regulated by opening or closing the lid.

A moxa box can be placed on the body (the back or abdomen) for longer treatments. A small wooden box (15cm x 13cm x 9cm) with a grille fixed inside is placed on the area to be treated, then moxa wool or sticks are lit on the grille. A lid is then placed on top of the box. The temperature can be regulated by opening or closing the lid to allow less or more oxygen to reach the burning moxa. This system is very safe and allows the practitioner to place the box directly over acupuncture needles and to work on other areas at the same time.

Although in Chinese medicine moxibustion is considered a yang method, in that it treats cold or yin type problems, it can also be used to treat heat symptoms. Sometimes clients have too much yang or heat in their upper bodies, and this can be balanced by using moxa on the extremities, especially the legs and feet. Also, according to the Five Element Acupuncture, which sees the body as an intricate balance between the universal elements of fire, earth, metal, water and wood, water points can be strengthened on the body to help reduce heat symptoms, such as heat in the liver. Experience and understanding of this system allows the practitioner to select this type of treatment when it is appropriate.

Usually if the skin is already inflamed, moxibustion is contraindicated. However, in some cases, inflammation is reduced by moxibustion, such as sinusitis where inflamed mucus membranes cause pain and irritation. Warming moxa in these cases produces excellent symptomatic relief while acupuncture or herbs can treat the deeper causes.

Moxibustion combined with acupuncture is extremely effective in relieving certain types of pain related to the neck, back, menstruation, digestion and arthritis or rheumatism. These complaints respond to moxibustion and acupuncture treatment



Pieces of moxa are placed on needles then lit. This helps to drive heat deeper into the muscles to relieve spasms.

because the pain is sometimes a result of a blockage: repeated use of moxa can help clear this blockage and increase the vital energy and blood to the area. In some cases, a practitioner may wish to access deeper levels of energy to remove blockages in areas such as the large muscles of the lower back. After inserting acupuncture needles into the muscles, pieces of moxa are placed onto the needles then lit. This procedure helps to drive heat deeper into the muscles to relieve spasms. With regular treatments, the muscles begin to loosen and, as normal circulation returns to the area, the associated pain can disappear.



Using this point (BL67) will encourage a breech baby to turn

Moxibustion has also been successful in relieving asthma, sinusitis, allergies, irregular and/or painful menstruation, arthritis, digestive problems and chronic tiredness. An unusual, but well documented, effect that moxibustion can produce is to correct the position of a breech baby. By treating an acu-point on the toe with moxa, the baby can gradually turn to the correct 'head down' position, ready for birth.

Although moxibustion is an ancient technique, it is still very relevant today in the treatment of many disorders. By helping to create a deep sense of calm and relaxation in the body, moxibustion invigorates our healing mechanisms, promoting good health and general well-being.

Recommended Reading

- *Handbook for Treatment of Acute Syndromes using Acupuncture and Moxibustion* by Professor Mingqing Zhu, translated by Dale Chow King, 8 Dragons Publishing
- *Moxibustion: Its Principles and Practice* by Turner and Low, Thorsons Publishing Group.
- *Acupuncture and Moxibustion – A Handbook for the Barefoot Doctors of China*, translated by Martin Elliot Silverstein, L Chang and N Macon
- *American Journal of Acupuncture – Role of Moxibustion in TCM* by Dr P Q Zhu, Vol 12 No. 2 June 1984
- *Course Notes for Students 1982-1986*, Acupuncture Collages Australia.

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