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Michaela Heys

X. Neil Dong

Andrew Cage

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Cupping Therapy: What is it and How is it Beneficial?

Michaela Heys, Kinesiology undergrad
 X. Neil Dong, Ph.D., associate professor
 Andrew Cage, M.Ed., ATC, LAT, CES, PES, CCT. Head Athletic Trainer.
 The University of Texas at Tyler



Introduction

Cupping is an alternative medicine therapy that is used to treat muscle pain, blood flow issues, muscle knots, swelling, and arthritis through suction created on the skin. It is most known for its use on muscle pain and tightness experienced by athletes. Head athletic trainer Andrew Cage explained that tightness in muscles is very common in sports. The more frequently muscles are used, the more oxygen they require. Sometimes, especially during vigorous training, the body is not able to supply the muscle with an adequate amount of oxygen, causing the muscle to tighten up. Once the muscle tightens up, it is even harder for oxygen to flow properly throughout it. Cupping vacuums up part of the muscle to stretch it out and pulls blood supply through the tight muscle, helping to increase blood flow to the area, which can then help the muscle further to relax and recover.



Photo taken by Michaela Heys



Photo taken by Michaela Heys

Athlete before and after cupping therapy treatment for paraspinal muscle tightness

Results and Conclusions

After they were finished being cupped, the athletes were questioned about their experiences and personal thoughts regarding the effects of the therapy. The three reported that they have been coming in twice per week every week during the duration of their season. All three reported that cupping therapy is something that has changed the way they have been able to play; their muscles were spending less time sore and tight, so their recovery time after practice or games was cut down, leading to improved performance and ability. The athletes also reported that they did not experience any negative side effects from the therapy, the only complaint being the round bruises that are left after treatment.

Methods

Research was conducted in the athletic training room on three willing pitchers from baseball team at the University of Texas at Tyler. The athletes reported that they were experiencing tightness in a specific part of their body. The first step taken was to have the athlete relax, then grape seed oil was rolled onto the area of their body that was to be cupped. The cups were placed in relevant locations decided by the trainer. A vacuum gun was used to draw air out of the cups in order to raise the skin in the area under the cups. Once all of the cups were put to use, the athlete let them sit for 15 minutes. Once the time had passed, the athletic trainer removed the cups and had the athlete stretch the muscle group to assess any more tightness or discomfort. When there was none, the therapy was done and the athlete was free to leave.



Photo taken by Michaela Heys

Athlete being treated for wrist flexor and pronator tightness

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