The benefits of massage cupping and benign residual cupping marks.

The most common misunderstanding regarding the after-effects of massage cupping is the potential marks that result.

Where dead or static blood, lymph, cellular debris, pathogenic factors and toxins are present in the body, cupping can leave marks which indicate that the stagnation or disease has been moved from the deeper tissue layers to the surface, allowing fresh oxygenated blood to nourish and heal the underlying areas.

In some industrialized countries where allopathic medicine has over-shadowed more holistic, natural approaches, these surface discolorations are misinterpreted as damage rather than the result of toxic agents being drawn to the surface. Westerners also live in an image conscious society that has a heightened sensitivity to domestic abuse. Without sufficient understanding, some people are unnerved seeing this after-effect.

Once people understand that these marks are therapeutic and feel the results, many concerns dissipate.

The color and pattern of the marks depend on the level of stagnation in the area, and range from a bright red to dark purple, usually lasting 3 days to one week; sometimes longer if the person is in a state of chronic congestion or leads a sedentary lifestyle. If there is no stagnation present, there will be only a light pink mark which disappears in a few minutes to a few of hours. Sites where there is old trauma or injury may require multiple cupping treatments to remove all stagnation. You will find in follow up treatments the marks will be visibly lighter and lighter as the pathogens are systemically removed from the body.

Cupping marks on a 2008 Olympian in Beijing.
Athletes at the 2008 Beijing Olympics benefited from massage cupping therapy.

Why would anyone trying to perform at their peak performance choose a therapy that did not help them do so?

The chemicals used in the pools that these athletes train and compete in is very toxic. Cupping draws these toxins out of the body which would otherwise lead to stagnation, blood poison, pain and disfunction. These athletes turn to cupping on a regular basis to detoxify and enhance their performance.

Many unfamiliar to cupping therapy, refer to the cup marks as bruises. Bruising is caused by impact trauma resulting in broken capillaries and a reactionary rush of fluids to the damaged tissue. There is no compression in correctly performed suction cup therapy. Although it is quite common during stationary dry cupping (left static for 5 - 20 minutes - see below) to achieve dramatic 'marks' or 'discolorations', the less aggressive action of moving the cups, minimizes the intensity and duration of the discolorations.

Often, when a condition exists within deeper structures where sufficient pathologic factors and stagnant fluids (toxins, blood and lymph) are dredged up during treatment, discoloration will appear on the epidermis. As treatments accumulate and the release of stagnation and buildup is released (sometimes as quickly as the 2nd treatment), no discoloration is likely to occur at all; although each time the cupping treatment may be identical to the first. The integrity of the underlying tissue and the efficiency of the lymphatic system will determine the severity and amount of time the marking takes to process.

The misleading headline that accompanied the above picture was "The Price of Gold in China".
Educating clients is important to ensure a positive massage cupping experience.

Regardless of the therapeutic value of drawing toxic agents out of the body, it is vitally important to educate every client on the nature of the discoloration and appropriate self care.

Provide each client a thorough understanding of the marks to assist them in relaying accurate information to others who might see them.

If a client has concerns about leaving discolorations, and/or the process of educating the client (including a release form) is unwanted, suction cup therapy is not for them. There are some people who will not want cupping marks no matter how potent the health benefits. A person uneducated about the marks (a significant other, and yes, even other health practitioners), may perceive the cupping marks as bruising and become very concerned.

It is the responsibility of the Practitioner to carefully screen, educate and support each client in this matter. Prior to any suction cup therapy, a release form should be signed and retained in the client’s records. Appropriate take-home documentation should also be provided to the client for their information.

CAUTION: When using magnetic cups (manual vacuum cups with magnet inserts), DO NOT MOVE THEM! If the magnet is touching the client’s skin, the client may be cut by the magnet even if no skin contact is observed. Some areas are more congested and resistant than others; as the suction cup moves into other less restricted areas, the client’s skin will move to fill more of the cup and come into contact with the sharp magnet.

The following is recommended as a display or handout to share with interested clients.
Massage Cupping

By creating suction and negative pressure, massage cupping therapy is used to soften tight muscles, loosen adhesions, and separate layers of connective tissue to bring hydration and blood flow to body tissues. Massage cupping bodywork is versatile and can easily be modified to accomplish a range of techniques, from facilitation of lymphatic drainage to deep-tissue myofacial release.

Massage Cupping is very relaxing, effective, and a time honored technique dating back thousands of years.

Suction pulls toxins, pathogenic factors, blood poison, dead lymph and cellular debris from deep within tissues to the skin. These toxic agents are then more easily expelled from the body with the use of massage cupping. The marks dissipate from a few hours to several weeks, depending on the amount of stagnation and post treatment activities. Massage cupping marks are an indication of existing disease and toxins being removed from deep within the tissues. If there is no restriction, pathogen, blockage in lymph or blood circulation, marks will appear light pink, which indicates normal healthy blood flow to the dermis and disappear within a few minutes after the treatment.

Usually, the greatest amount of deposits being drawn to the surface will occur in the first few treatments- this is a good thing. The marks will lessen in intensity as the deeper issues are resolved and stagnations and toxins are processed out of the body via the circulatory and lymphatic systems.

NOTE: Sweating is often effective following a massage cupping treatment to help remove toxins that were mechanically released. Severe temperatures should be avoided for 4-24 hours.

Although the marks look painful, they are not; Clients usually feel an immediate sense of relief.