

Gua Sha (From Wikipedia)



☞ **Gua Sha** (Chinese: 刮痧; pinyin: *guā shā*), literally "to scrape away fever" in Chinese (more loosely, "to scrape away disease by allowing the disease to escape as sandy-looking objects through the skin"), is an ancient medical treatment.

Sometimes referred to as "spooning" by English speakers, it has also been given the descriptive French name, "tribo-effleurage".

The Vietnamese term for this practice is *cao gio* (pronounced "cow yaw"), meaning roughly to "scrape wind", as in Vietnamese culture "catching a cold" or fever is often referred to as *trug gio* "to catch wind". The origin of this term is the Shang Han Lun, a ~220 CE Chinese Medical text on cold induced disease - like most Asian countries China's medical sciences were a profound influence in Vietnam, especially between the 5th and 7th Centuries CE. *Cao gio* is an extremely common remedy in Vietnam and for overseas Vietnamese.

It is also used in Indonesia. It is a traditional Javanese technique, known as *kerikan* (lit., "scraping technique") or *kerokan*, and it is very widely used, as a form of "folk" medicine, upon members of individual households.

"Folk" technique

In describing the Gua Sha techniques as a form of "folk" medicine, the term "folk" is not being used in any pejorative sense. It is used to emphasize:

- the extremely widespread domestic use of the technique (thus, used by the "folk") as a method of first-contact intervention,
- that complex medical diagnosis is not required (and, thus, any decision to use or not use Gua Sha can be reliably made by the "folk"), and
- the overall safety of the technique (meaning that it is safe for the "folk" to use).

Notwithstanding, the Gua Sha technique is just as important a part of the legitimate practice of the specialist practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine as is the use of fire cupping; and it is a highly reputable technique that is applied just as much by these highly trained experts as it is applied by the "folk" users.

As with many of the "folk" methods that are used domestically as a form of first intervention, the use of Gua Sha often precludes any need for any more complex medical treatment; and, because its use means that further medical treatment is unnecessary, the technique, although extremely widespread, is often hidden from view, and its role as a very significant and very important participant in the overall health care of a community may not be immediately apparent.

Therefore, in the case of Gua Sha, the term "folk" medicine should not be thought of as separate from the practice of more complex Traditional Chinese Medicine, but far more as an immediate form of domestic "first-aid" intervention that serves to prevent any need for further medical intervention by a medical professional.

Technique

Gua Sha involves repeated pressured strokes over lubricated skin with a smooth edge. Commonly a ceramic Chinese soup spoon was used, or a well worn coin, even honed animal bones, water buffalo horn, or jade. A simple metal cap with a rounded edge is commonly used.

In cases of fatigue from heavy work a piece of ginger root soaked in rice wine is sometimes used to rub down the spine from head to tail.

The smooth edge is placed against the pre-oiled skin surface, pressed down firmly, and then moved down the muscles -- hence the term "tribo-effleurage" (i.e., friction-stroking) -- or along the pathway of the acupuncture meridians, along the surface of the skin, with each stroke being about 4-6 inches long.

This causes extravasation of blood from the peripheral capillaries (petechiae) and may result in sub-cutaneous blemishing (ecchymosis), which usually takes 2-4 days to fade. Sha rash does not represent capillary rupture as in bruising, as is evidenced by the immediate fading of petechiae to ecchymosis, and the rapid resolution of sha as compared to bruising. The color of sha varies according to the severity of the patient's blood stasis - - which may correlate with the nature, severity and type of their disorder --appearing from a dark blue-black to a light pink, but is most often a shade of red. Although the marks on the skin look painful, they are not. Patients typically feel immediate sense of relief and change.

Practitioners tend to follow the tradition they were taught to obtain sha: typically using either gua sha or fire cupping. The techniques are not used together.

Indications

In classical Chinese practice, the Gua Sha technique is most commonly used to:

- Reduce fever (the technique was used to treat cholera).
- Treat fatigue caused by exposure to heat (often used to treat heat-stroke) or cold.
- Cough and dyspnea: bronchitis, asthma, emphysema.
- Treat muscle and tendon injuries.
- Push sluggish circulation, fibromyalgia.
- Treat headache.
- Treat sunstrokes / heat syncope and nausea.
- Treat stiffness, pain, immobility.
- Treat digestive disorders.
- Treat urinary, gynecological disorders.
- To assist with reactions to food poisoning. ^[6]

