

Cupping Works Even Better on Your Face

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Photographed by Ellen Von Unwerth, *Vogue*, June 1994

In this era of smartphone-fueled anxiety, it's comforting to be reminded that sometimes the best things in life are tech-free. Cupping—an ancient healing practice in which heated or suction-pumped glass domes are used to pull up and stimulate the body tissue beneath—made headlines earlier this year when Michael Phelps displayed the treatment's telltale round bruises on his back at the Rio Olympic Summer Games. That Phelps went on to win five gold medals there and become the most decorated Olympian in history reinforced what practitioners have been saying all along: that it does a body good. Believers claim the lo-fi treatment, by stimulating blood and lymph flow and stretching fascia, relieves everything from muscle pain to poor circulation. I'm one of them. I tried it once, after a long transatlantic flight, and felt a palpable lifting of my jet lag and bodily tension as I sank into blissful sleep.

So when, during a recent routine appointment to treat my own smartphone-induced anxiety acupuncturist Shellie Goldstein told me she wanted to try cupping on my face—and that doing so was all the rage among the wellness avant-garde—only one qualm arose: But would it bruise? When Goldstein assured me it wouldn't—and showed me a group of finger-size glass

beakers with rubber suction bulbs on the ends, which looked about as harmless as Baoding balls-I acquiesced.

The process of gently, manually sucking up sections of the face “improves skin circulation, encourages lymph drainage, tones tissue that is flaccid, and relaxes tightness,” Goldstein explained. “It increases the diffusion and receptivity of skin cell nutrients, stimulates collagen and elastin, and restores new skin tissue.” And though she recommends a series of six to 12 weekly sessions for results to really stick, “it’s a great thing to do before a big event,” she noted. “It gives you that lifted, sculpted look.” Because the devices are so simple and affordable (well-reviewed kits can be found online starting at around \$24), some people have even taken up the practice at home, though Goldstein, who combines her treatment with a series of nutrient-rich skin serums, discourages this: “A skilled practitioner understands facial anatomy and the pathways of the lymph system,” she said. “Deep relaxation is also hard to achieve when you’re doing it to yourself.”

Point taken, I closed my eyes. The first thing I noticed was a soft *pfffht* sound, followed by what felt like a particularly ardent, albeit dry, French kiss sliding up and down the contours of my neck. I burst out laughing: “You’re not giving me hickeys, are you?” Shaking her head no, Goldstein gently squeezed the pump and slid the tube along my jawline, under my cheekbones, across my forehead, into my TMJ-prone jaw muscles. The sensation might best be described as a cross between being massaged and being Hoovered; it was pleasantly stimulating, and when it ended after what felt like only a few minutes, I felt a twinge of disappointment.

Not disappointing, however, was the result in the mirror. My skin was tighter, pinker, plumper; my jawline lifted. The irksome fine lines on my forehead had taken leave, and my eyebrows even appeared slightly higher. I’d been skeptical, but it was as if I’d just awakened from a five-year nap. “Look at those cheekbones,” Goldstein said admiringly. Having barely sacrificed any extra time (her sessions, with their added skin-treatment component, run 30 minutes), I returned triumphantly to the office, where a colleague complimented me on my unusually rested appearance. Later that night, I told my boyfriend what had happened. He narrowed his eyes. “You know, maybe your face does look a bit thinner and more angular,” he surmised. Two days later, apropos of nothing, he revised his opinion. “I don’t know why,” he said, “but you look more beautiful this week than you ever have.” Score one for the Luddites.

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