

Rio Olympics and Athletes with Red Spots

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For ages, man has been using complementary and alternative medical (CAM) therapy, either alone or in adjunction with allopathic treatment. Approximately 80% of the world's population has used alternative medicine in their life time [1]. In recent times, beneficial effects have been noted and scientifically proven.

Recently, many of the athletes at the Rio Olympics have been observed to have dark red circular spots on their bodies. These blood colored spots were neither due to bleeding disorders nor coagulopathies but were attributed to the use of cupping therapy which is very trendy among modern day athletes.

Cupping therapy (also known as Hijama) is an ancient CAM therapy which is still in use. It uses the principle of sucking by creating vacuum under the cupping glass or cup which is mostly applied to the skin on the back of the body. The high vacuum that is created causes vasodilatation and enhanced microcirculation of the vessels under the skin. The improvement in microcirculation causes removal of toxic waste products that normally attribute to the cramps in muscles during periods of exercise in athletes. This vasodilatation is actually the contributor of the redness noted after undergoing cupping therapy [2, 3].

Upon reviewing literature, there is no published study which specifically studies the use of cupping therapy in athletes. In addition, Arslan and co-authors supported the use of cupping therapy for non-specific shoulder and back pain in their study [4]. Similar results were published by Chi and co-authors [3]. Since both studies were conducted on small scale, large scale studies are needed.

As the literature is deficient regarding the use of cupping therapy, a multi-centered trial should be conducted to investigate the effects of cupping therapy. Moreover, since the use of cupping therapy is increasing among athletes, its use in athletes needs to be studied as well.

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Conflict of Interest: None declared

This article has been peer reviewed.

Article Submitted on: 10th August 2016

Article Accepted on: 1st September 2016

Funding sources: None declared

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Cite this article: Khan HH, Khan ZH. Rio Olympics and athletes with red spots. *J Pioneer Med Sci*. 2016; 6(4): 127