

MOXA POTS

by Susan Johnson, L.Ac.

Moxa is an excellent way to deeply warm the body, more important now, as we head into winter. In fact, between the change of seasons, there is a two week period which my Teacher, Dr. Ta, refers to as “Moxa Season.” During this interval, he says that the “gate is open.” If a person is to become ill during this time, the illness is said to invade the body more deeply and be quite difficult to expel. I have experienced this first hand, and with patients, as well.

The very good news, is that during this precise season (the next one begins November 7th), we can profoundly strengthen and build the body, too, if we just tend it carefully. The gate is open, we only have to turn up the heat. That is where moxa comes in. Moxa, or mugwort can deeply penetrate into the MingMen or Lifegate, where it will build the body in ways that cannot be otherwise accomplished. Moxa during Moxa Season allows one to gain ground that could be easily lost if one were to become ill, at this time.

The first moxa pots I ever saw, were in Dr. Miriam Lee’s clinic. She had them handmade in China, and brought them back to the US, six at a time. They were very precious to us, and we soon learned to charge a deposit when we gave them to patients to take home. A properly loaded moxa pot can slowly burn for 2 hours. It is truly a heavenly warmth, as the days grow darker and the nights colder. We purchase low grade moxa, as we will use quite a lot of it. Some people use a mixture of powdered herbs to make it burn evenly, which does help, but one must only learn to load and check the pots, correctly, for a nice slow burn.

When loading a moxa pot, gently break up the clods, that are stuck together, to keep the punk light and fluffy. Once the basket is full, give it a gentle pat, and add a little bit more, being careful not to let any moxa fall between the basket and the sides of the pot. Lighting the pot is best done outside, as that part of the process is quite smoky. Holding the pot on its side and with its open top facing the wind, use a lighter or any other form of flame, even a stick of lit incense, to ignite the punk in many places around the moxa at the top of the basket. Blow on it cautiously, from the side, so as not to get smoke or ash in your face. In Dr. Ta’s clinic, they have placed a big fan to blow out the window, and they put the moxa pots on the windowsill until the top is glowing and they are sure to stay lit. This should take a minute or two. If left much longer the moxa in the pot will burn up quickly, but if shut down too soon, they will extinguish.

The pots are then placed in some kind of towel or protective wrap or cover, and placed on the body in strategic places. As the pots get hot, additional layers of towel are added which are then removed, as the pot begins to cool down. It is very important that the patient has a hand to move the pot with, if they are not closely attended. Otherwise, each patient must be given a bell to ring or some way to alert others when the pots gets too hot. When a moxa pot gets too hot, it is essential that there is no delay in responding to the patient. A hot pot can feel like it is burning the skin, which is possible, though usually it is not. People who have a thicker layer of fat, or some elderly patients, may not feel the

heat as others do, so it is very important to check the pots regularly. Each person must have a way to move the pot around or take it off, in the event that no one is immediately available when it becomes "too" hot.

When the moxa pot has done a good job of heating, there will be a 2 inch pink mark on the skin underneath the pot. This color may dissipate quickly once the pot is removed. However, later the same day or even the next day, should the patient take a hot shower or get into a hot tub, the same mark will reappear, indicating the heat that is still present in that location.

We always did lots and lots of moxa in Dr. Lee's clinic. She would often start the patient out with four pots on their lower back, surrounding the MingMen area (UB23). After 20 minutes or so, she would turn them over and place two pots in the area of Qi Hai (CV6) and Guan Yuan (CV4). The other two pots would be slung over the anterior tibia in either a sock or a folded hand towel to land perfectly on Zu San Li (ST36). Be extra careful to close the lid firmly and secure the pot in such a way that it will not easily roll off. Should the pot accidentally fall to the ground, it may open unexpectedly and the glowing embers burn the carpet or the floor. Always be very cautious when opening a burning pot. If a pot is not burning properly, one may open the lid and blow on it until the punk is glowing again, or if not too hot, the holes on the side of the pot may give enough access to the moxa inside, that one can simply blow through the sides of the pot to get things going again. Loading the pot correctly, assures a complete burn.

My dear colleague, Dr. Raven Lang has written a beautiful piece, intitled "Mother Roasting", on the use of moxa during postpartum. I strongly recommend that booklet. Little else had been written on the profound effects of moxa.

Dr. Hoang Ta has taken over the production of moxa pots, in Viet Nam. They can be purchased through his clinic Ta's Healing Center, in San Jose, CA., or through my clinic. Visit us at www.tungspoints.com, or call (831)476-4648. As they are handmade, sometimes there will be a delay in shipping them out to you, but we do our best. Someday, we may have a class in moxa only. Until that time, I hope that you will discover on your own, the incredible benefits available through the use of moxa in this way. Moxa softens lumps or tumors, increases circulation, tonifies and strengthens the constitution and immune system, builds Qi and Blood and increases whole body energy, not to mention how wonderfully cozy and warm it makes one feels, all over. It is impossible to say enough about the many uses of moxa, in this short article. Please see for yourselves. Though some will complain about the smell, others will love it. Be sure that the patient has dark clothing on, if it is done over the clothes, and that old towels or socks are used to surround the pots, as the smoke can leave a brown stain. Minimize the smokiness of the room, by shutting the pot down with appropriate layers of cloth, so that only the faintest wisps of smoke might be seen.

May you all discover the remarkable healing properties of moxa, and the beauty of these very special moxa pots.

