

Coining: What You Need to Know

The Asian population in the United States, and particularly in California, is growing. Many Chinese and South Asian families use alternative and traditional treatment methods such as coining, cupping, pinching, acupuncture, massage, herbal, and dietary therapies to treat childhood illnesses. Coining is one of these healing practices that may cause injuries or physical harm and your child care provider may mistake it for abuse and assume that the child is in danger.

What is Coining

Coining, or cao gio (pronounced gow yaw), is a common Southeast Asian alternative treatment for minor illnesses such as cold, flu, headache, fever, pain, cough, or low energy. Cao gio literally translates to “catch the wind.” It is believed that too much “wind” in the blood is the cause of many illnesses, and coining will bring the blood to the surface by which a “bad wind” can be released.

The practice of coining involves rubbing heated oil on the skin, most commonly the chest, back, or shoulders, and then strongly rubbing a coin over the area in a linear fashion until a red mark is seen – a doorway for the wind to get out. This practice is very similar to “gua sha,” a Chinese alternative medicine, which often uses rounded stones or other tools.

Are there any complications?

Minor burns are the most common complication of coining. However, more serious complications, including severe burns, bruises, bleeding in the brain, camphor intoxication, and renal contusion (kidney injury), are also reported in the medical literature. In addition, several parents who use coining for treatment of their children have been accused of child abuse.

Why is alternative and traditional medicine used?

The treatment of illnesses often relates to beliefs about their causes. The use of coining and other procedures and home remedies also refers to the traditional beliefs, practices, and materials people use to maintain health and cope with disease.

Several factors including economic status, limited access to health care, duration of stay in the United States and effects of acculturation, and proven efficacy play a direct role in the usage of folk remedies. Folk remedies are less expensive than conventional medicine, consisting of items found within the home.

Tips to keep in mind

- The decision to use traditional and alternative treatment is important. As an informed parent you need to consider the safety and effectiveness of the treatment, the expertise and qualifications of the practitioner, and the particular illness before selecting any such method of treatment.
- Understanding the safety, effectiveness, indications for use and proper dosage of alternative remedies is also important for avoiding possible interactions or harmful delays in getting conventional treatment.
- Some practices may be confused with signs of child abuse and your child care, and health care providers may need to know about traditional healing rituals of your ethnic group.

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References and Resources

CCHP Fact Sheets for Families: Alternative Medicine at www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at www.nccam.nih.gov

EthnoMed, Harborview Medical Center’s ethnic medicine website containing medical and cultural information about immigrant and refugee groups at <http://ethnomed.org>

Creighton University Medical Center at <http://altmed.creighton.edu/>



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