

Moxibustion

Moxibustion (or “moxa” for short) is an ancient practice of using burning *ài yè* 艾叶, or aged Chinese mugwort leaves (*Artemisiae argyi folium*), above acupuncture points on the skin. It is thought that moxibustion may predate using acupuncture needles, and is a very important part of Chinese medicine! The purpose of moxa is to deeply warm the body, which can help with conditions such as poor digestion (especially loose stools), low energy and fatigue, frequently catching colds or flus, irregular menstruation, fertility, old injuries, and pain.

There are many different forms of moxa. The most common form in the United States is stick or pole moxa, which is the style described in the directions below. There are also stick-on mini-moxa poles, loose moxa, and spray moxa. There are also tools that you can use with moxa, such as moxa boxes, tiger rollers, and more - please make sure to get training in these before using them so you don't burn yourself! Not every acupuncture point is recommended for moxa, but some common points are listed at the end of this sheet.

How To Use Moxa Poles

Supplies:

- Moxa stick/pole
- Lighter (and candle, preferably)
- Fire-proof container (glass, ceramic, etc.) with sand or rice in the bottom

Steps:

1. **Light the moxa stick.** If you're using a smokeless moxa pole, this can take a little bit of time, so it is easiest to light a candle and hold the moxa stick in the candle flame until it is lit. You can GENTLY blow on the tip of the moxa stick to ensure it is lit.
2. **Hold the moxa stick about 1" from the skin** above the points mentioned below, or in the areas selected by your acupuncturist. NEVER contact the skin with the lit moxa stick.
3. **Move the moxa stick in small circles above the area of the acupuncture point until the skin feels warm.** You can also slowly move the moxa stick further from and slightly closer to the skin (maintaining about a 1" distance from the skin) to find the right distance for your body. The goal is to warm the acupuncture point and area. It is normal for the skin to get a bit pink.
4. **Once the point feels warm but not hot, move on to the next point.** After doing each point/area once, you can start again at the first point. The goal is to **warm each point 2-3 times in each session!** Each time you go to the point, it will likely take less time to feel the warmth in the spot.
5. **Make sure to tap off or roll off the ash after each point into a fire-safe container.** This keeps the lit area available to warm the area, as well as protects your skin and the floor from falling ash.
6. When you are done, **extinguish the moxa stick completely prior to storing it in a fire-safe container.** It is easiest to extinguish it by placing the lit end in sand or rice and leaving it there for 10+ minutes. You can also run the lit tip under running water, though this could damage the stick. *The stick may appear extinguished but still be lit inside* - make sure to store in a fire-safe container.
7. The moxa stick can be used multiple times! Just relight the same end during the next session. **It's recommended you apply moxa at least 2-3 times per week**, though you should follow the specific recommendations of your acupuncturist. You can apply moxa daily, if you'd like.

Cautions:

- The smokeless moxa stick burns similarly to a charcoal briquette. It will glow orange-red and can get EXTREMELY HOT, so **avoid touching the lit end to any skin**.
- The moxa stick is considered smokeless, but does produce a small amount of smoke and will have a scent, so if you're sensitive to scents or have asthma, make sure to **use moxa in a well-ventilated room**.
- Make sure to perform moxa in a safe area and **do not use over flammable surfaces** - for example, avoid doing moxa in bed! Ideally, perform the moxa over an area with no carpet.
- Make sure to **tap or roll off any ash produced into a fire-safe container** so that it does not fall on your skin or the floor.
- **Make sure the moxa stick is COMPLETELY extinguished when you're finished**. You can do this by placing the lit end in sand or running the tip under running water. Make sure to only store the stick in fire-safe containers (for example, glass or ceramic containers). You may not be able to see the inside of the stick burning, so leave in a fireproof container for storage.

When to avoid moxa:

- Avoid using moxa when sick, including having a fever, or other "hot" acute conditions (such as hemorrhoids).
- Avoid areas that already feel warm, are red, or have a lot of inflammation, such as recent injuries.
- Do not perform moxa on areas where you have reduced sensation (such as peripheral neuropathy).
- Do not do moxa on the face, head, neck, or groin.
- If you notice your body temperature becomes uncomfortably warm after using the moxa, consider using less often, selecting less points, or consulting with an acupuncturist to determine if moxa is the right modality for you.
- Avoid moxa on the abdomen during pregnancy; while generally very safe, consult with a licensed acupuncturist to ensure moxa is appropriate for you during pregnancy.

Common points for moxa:

- **Spleen 6** - helps build Blood and is helpful with fatigue from overwork. This point is also used for menstrual irregularity, painful periods, and to help with fertility.
- **Kidney 3** - helps build up Kidney yin and yang in the body; great for those with low back pain and/or knee pain, especially if areas are cold to the touch.
- **Stomach 36** - helps with fatigue, frequent colds and flus, and digestion; calming and grounding. Builds Qi and Blood in the body. One of the top points for moxa!
- **Abdomen** - helps with digestion, especially loose stools or constipation from cold (such as eating a lot of cold foods or if your abdomen is cold to the touch). Perform moxa over the belly button, and in a circle about 2" away from the belly button. **You can use a slice of ginger to warm the digestion**: place salt in the belly button and then a slice of ginger on top of the salt. Use the moxa pole as usual over the belly button to warm the area.
- **Lower abdomen** (the 2-5" directly below the belly button) - can help with fatigue, urination, digestion, fertility, and building yin and yang.
- **Low back (lumbar spine)** - ask for help from a partner or friend! This is best when you're experiencing low back pain that is cold to the touch, or feels better with warmth (like a heating pad or hot shower).
- **Old injuries** - moxa is good for old injuries (not recent injuries that are still hot and inflamed), especially if they feel stiff and/or cold. Warm the entire area of the injury.