

Gua Sha: More Than Skin Deep

By Goldie Bonnell, ESPA



Gua sha has existed in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for thousands of years to alleviate symptoms of various ailments. This practice, and other areas of Chinese medicine, have been passed down for generations based on the idea of a connection between one's mind, body, and energy (qi). Gua means press or scrape and sha means redness or flush.

Historical Use

In history, gua sha was commonly used to alleviate muscle soreness, tension, and pain by increasing the body's blood flow and improving lymphatic stagnation through scraping a tool, stone or one's own hands across certain areas of the body.

It was not until the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) that anything resembling the practice of cosmetic scraping appeared, in the form of jade rubbing to treat facial scars in the Northern Song era. TCM continued to influence new ideas in facial gua sha in the Qin and Han dynasties, which unified China through the 20th Century.

These beliefs showed how the human body and skin color changed directly, effecting the behavior, temperament, age, health, qi and blood of an individual. In the 20th century, the work of Jiang Jingbo and later Lu Jiru was recorded. Gua sha is sometimes referred to as "coining" or "spooning," as it was historically done using a ceramic Chinese soup spoon or a coin.

Gua sha has been reinvigorated and modernized, and various styles of gua sha therapy within TCM were adapted. The development of gua sha is something that is far from being static and is constantly reborn, developed and improved throughout its history.

For beauty purposes, facial gua sha increases circulation and helps promote lymphatic drainage, which leads to a clearer complexion, decreased puffiness and reduced redness. It also increases the detoxification process to produce a brighter complexion. In addition, increased circulation stimulates the production of anti-aging molecules. Collagen helps to reduce fine lines and wrinkles, and elastin restores firmness to give a firmer tone to the face.

Side Effects

Be aware that gua sha can produce light bruising, as the scraping produces a light petechiae. Tiny capillaries burst under the skin appearing like a rash or slight pink to even purple. This bruising can last anywhere from one to seven days. However, it is not sensitive or painful.

Gua sha is not a procedure suitable for everybody, and it may cause more harm than good for those who should not go through the procedure. Those who should avoid a gua sha treatment include those who had surgery in the last six weeks, those with medical conditions affecting the skin or veins, those with an infection, tumor or wound that is yet to be completely healed, those that bleed easily or anyone with an implant, those with deep vein thrombosis, those who take medication to thin their blood, and those who have blood clotting disorders.

Tool Materials

here are a variety of gua sha tools to choose from. The most common is a flat stone with an edge that curves inward at an angle similar to the side of one's face, so it is especially good to use on the neck and décolleté.

Rose quartz. One of the most common stones used is rose quartz, as it relates to the heart. It's considered to be a healing crystal and the stone of unconditional love.

"A daily act of devotion for the skin, the gua sha tool is made using rose quartz, a crystal which is believed to promote unconditional love and peace. This heart-shaped tool glides effortlessly over the contours of your face for a mindful skin care ritual, promoting natural beauty and inner calm," noted ESPA .

Jade. Jade promotes a calm environment, balance, and positivity, as well as protection against negative energy. Jade is also known for its ability to cool, so it helps de-puff while clearing inflammation.

Beauty Benefits of Gua Sha

- Improves the movement of lymphatic fluids
- Breaks down tension in muscles and knots in the face, neck and shoulders
- Reduces facial lines
- Can be used as a gentle, natural face-lift
- De-puffs eyes
- Sharpens cheekbones
- Increases blood circulation while lifting and firming the skin
- Gives the face a smoother complexion and more sculpted features
- Reduces hyperpigmentation on the treated surface area of the skin

Amethyst. This stone helps to relieve stress and reduce negative energy. The dark purple stone promotes clarity and relaxation.

Stainless steel. Stainless steel gua sha tools are non-porous and cooling.

Bone. Traditional gua sha tools were once made from animal bones, but this is less common today. Most gua sha tools are now made with stone materials.

Bian stone or empress stone. This healing stone has been used in TCM for thousands of years, which has given gua sha its roots. According to folklore, a meteor struck the side of a mountain and created a blast that produced a special combination of stone and minerals with healing abilities. Due to the collision, Bian stone is said to emit ultrasound pulsations and negative ions, which are known for their antioxidant and anti-aging effects on our cells and DNA. The Bian stone contains about 40 trace minerals known for their health benefits. It is also known to cleanse your aura and balance your energy.

How to: Facial Gua Sha



Gua sha can be used on the face, body, and scalp, but it should never be used on bare skin. It should always be used with water or a treatment oil. Use the gua sha tool around the body's lymph nodes to stimulate lymphatic drainage to reduce swelling in any problem areas. Gua sha tools should be warmed in water to increase blood flow and the body's healthy qi.

Step 1. Hold the gua sha tool with the curved side to your face and glide it gently up and out, starting with the neck, jawline, chin and around the mouth. Between three and five times per area, use short strokes in one direction, not back and forth. Otherwise, this interferes with proper lymph circulation. It's important to remember to glide with the flat side of the stone rather than the slender edge and do this at about a 30-degree angle.

Step 2. Next, press the gua sha flat to the skin under the eyes or over any redness to soothe and de-puff to create calm environment and relaxation. Sweep a gua sha tool over the under-eye area and out to the temple, all the way to the hairline. Repeat three times on each eye.

Step 3. Work the tool from the inside corner of the brow bone out to the temple area. Work the gua sha in linear horizontal strokes over the brow bone to lift or hold and press upwards between the brows to release tension.

Step 4. Lightly scrape the tool up the bridge of your nose.

Step 5. Bring it down along the side of the nose to the cheek. Do this on the right side followed by left, each three times.

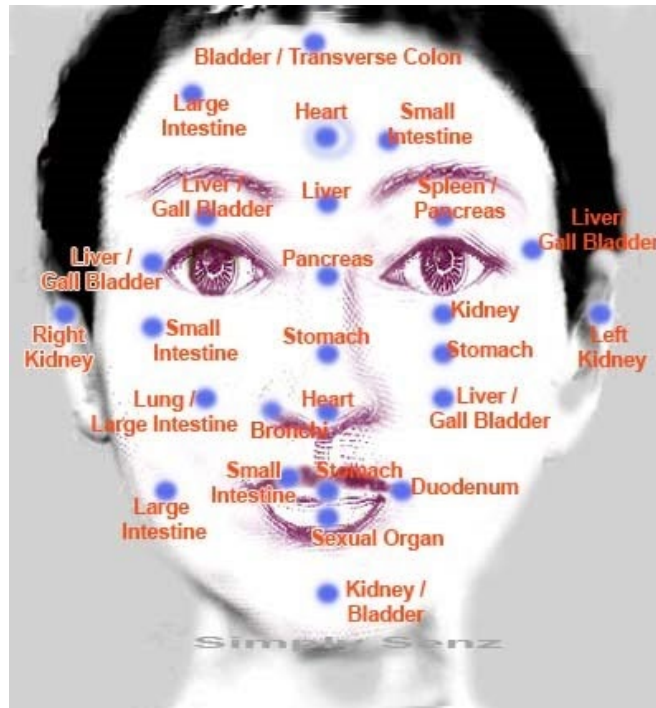
Step 6. Stroke down the neck and never upward to drain lymph. Drain toward terminus.

Step 7. Start at the chin, then sweep the gua sha tool along your jawline and up to the ear.

Step 8. Move the tool behind the earlobe and then down the neck three times.

Step 9. Start at the outer corner of the jaw near the earlobe. Sweep down the neck to terminus. Do this on the right side, followed by the left side, each three times.

Facial Meridians



In TCM, there are 12 major pathways called meridians, which reflect the 12-organ system. It is through these meridians that qi energy flows.

The face is connected and links with the main imbalances in the body. This directly links with skin tone and skin conditions, as it reflects imbalance in the organs of the body.

The 12 major meridians are lung, large intestines, stomach, spleen, pancreas, heart, small intestines, bladder, kidney, heart governor, triple heater (hormones), gallbladder and liver. They are running up and down throughout the whole body and face. That is why an interrupted flow of energy can cause issues in certain organs, which will show up on the face that corresponds with the particular meridian.

Below is more detail of the meridians of the face and corresponding organs.

Forehead Skin conditions: Spots and blackheads/open comedones around the temples and hairline. Links to: The spleen

Cheeks Skin conditions: Redness, rosacea, inflammation, and irritation. Links to: The Lungs, histamine levels, too much sugar and gluten in your diet.

Nose Skin conditions: Redness or dry, flaky skin on the sides of the nose, darkness around the mouth, blackheads/open comedones around the nose, mouth, and chin. Links to: The stomach, digestion, and digestive issues.

Mouth Skin conditions: Small cracks around the mouth, dry lips, acne around the mouth and jaw. Links to: Intestines, bowels, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) and liver energy.

Jawline Skin conditions: Blackheads/ open comedones and whiteheads/closed comedones, collagen and skin texture. Links to: Gallbladder system, testosterone, fatty foods, and alcohol.

Redness and Skin Tone Skin conditions: Redness, rosacea, inflammation, uneven skin tone, dark under eyes. Links to: Blood circulation, kidney function, stress, digestion, pain and anxiety.

Goldie Bonnell is an international training manager for ESPA's (ESPA skincare) American division. She has more than 25 years of experience in the skin care and wellness industries. She has designed programs and client treatments for many spas, and she is a featured speaker at industry trade shows.