

Using Moxa Safely, by Steve Knobler, LAc

Moxa or Mugwort is an herb used in Asian medicine to build or move Qi (energy) within the body. It does this by emitting a huge amount of deep, penetrating heat when it burns. Moxa is packaged in many forms; sticks, cones, grains, and loose. This document explains how to safely use moxa sticks and stick-on cones. The process is simple but important to follow so you can stay safe. If you have any questions about using moxa, please contact me at either steve@northseaforme.com or 206-524-6428.

Moxa can be used to warm several places on the body. This example uses the knee. Here's a typical acupuncturist's knee. Our goal will be to warm the inside of the knee, just below the kneecap.

IMPORTANT: Using Moxa is a simple yet serious therapy. Some areas of the body are not appropriate or safe for its use. PLEASE, work with your acupuncturist to decide where you will use moxa, in what way, and for how long.



This is a roll of stick moxa. It is roughly one foot long and wrapped in paper. We'll be using it in this example. We'll burn it for a few minutes and then put it out (dowse it). A stick can be reused several times until it burns down, just like a cigar. At about one to two inches, it's time to get a new one. Cost? Not a problem. Each stick is only about one dollar.

Dowsing the stick is best done in sand, and sand should be kept in a glass or ceramic container. Here's my little glass cup for dowsing. The sand is reusable. Just rinse and dry it periodically to get the ash out.



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Before we light the moxa, we have to unwrap it. You could leave it wrapped, but that would create more smoke and believe me, this is smokey stuff! Another important point is that moxa smells like cannabis (pot)! It won't make you high, so don't even try inhaling. There's no benefit from it. If you notice, I'm performing this demonstration outside. That's because of the smoke. Make sure everyone in your house is okay with smoke before lighting up a moxa stick. Otherwise, using the back yard is a good idea!

Here's the unwrapped stick. Notice that I've peeled off about one inch. That's a good amount to work with. Don't worry if you peel too much. You'll eventually use it!



The next step is to light the stick. I'm using a long handled butane lighter here. A match works fine, too, but you may need a few to really get the stick going. Once lit, gently blow on the tip to make it glow. Be careful about flying embers! Treat this just like a cigar.

Okay. Now we're cooking! Notice how I'm holding the stick near my leg, but I'm not touching it? It's really important to warm, not burn, your body. So hold the stick close enough to heat your body, not injure it. The three most important things I can tell you about using moxa are: pay attention, keep the stick moving, and...pay attention! Don't burn yourself!!!

How much should you do? Decide that with your acupuncturist.



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Just like a cigar, as moxa burns, it leaves ashes. Take periodic breaks from warming your body to clear off the loose ash from the end of the stick. You can gently tap or scrape the ash on the rim of your sand cup.

When you are done warming your body, douse the moxa in the cup. Leave it there for at least 10 minutes to make sure it's really out. Feel the tip afterwards to make sure it's cool and then put it away.

That's it! You've just performed some warm and rewarding moxa therapy. Repeat this process as often as required. And remember... don't burn yourself!!!



This next section discusses using a different type of moxa - smokeless stick-ons

This is stick-on moxa and it's the smokeless type. The name isn't really accurate because it does produce some smoke, but not as much as a regular stick.

As the name implies, these stick-ons have adhesive bases that allow you to adhere them to the skin. Clean off any makeup, oil or sweat from your skin before applying one to your body.



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Here's one stuck on my leg. It doesn't look very exciting, but it does the job. Compared to a stick, the heat is more focused and it creates less smoke.

Time to light up. Be careful with your flame! You may find it easier and safer to light these before placing them on your body. Pay attention to the heat it generates. Pull it off immediately if you feel it's getting too hot.



Never burn the moxa down past its paper base. As mentioned above, pay attention to the amount of heat generated. If you feel you've had enough or are about to get burned, pull it off immediately!

Just as with stick moxa, dowse your stick-on in your sand cup. Leave it there for at least ten minutes and feel it afterwards to make sure it's fully extinguished.

That's it!

