Safety Concerns about the Application of Moxa

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【Abstract】Objective: To discuss the safety issues of moxibustion therapy in view of moxibustion materials. Methods: The analyses and assessment were performed based on the survey carried out on the use of moxa, modern and ancient records, modern studies, and clinical applications. Results: Moxa has been used as both a medicine and a food for a long history in China. Regarding moxibustion specifically, moxa has been proven to be the optimum choice for moxibustion therapy, through practices and experiments by doctors from different generations. No records have shown any side- or adverse-effects of moxa applied in moxibustion therapy. Conclusion: Moxa has been used in multiple ways for several thousands of years by Chinese people. As the main material for moxibustion therapy, its safety has been proven by documents and clinical practices.

【Key Words】Moxa; Moxibustion Therapy; Moxa Floss; Moxa Cone; Moxa Stick; Moxibustion Materials

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Moxibustion is an external therapy to warm qi and blood, strengthen healthy energy and expel pathogens. This is carried out through the action of warm stimulation and the use of medical herbs, with the moxa fluff as the main material smoldered at acupoints or the affected area [1]. Moxa is most frequently used in moxibustion therapy, which has been created, developed and improved gradually over thousands of years of fighting against disease. Moxibustion has played an important role in traditional Chinese medicine, as it has been adopted in various aspects, such as in treatment of diseases, health maintenance, and longevity. However, problems still exist in the promotion of the application of moxibustion therapy after so many years’ clinical practice, because people doubt effect of the smoke produced by moxibustion as well as the inconvenience of application. It has been recorded that the use of branches and straws for moxibustion predated moxa, but why did the medical practitioners choose moxa to be the best moxibustion material? Is it safe? Is it possible that the smoke produced by moxibustion is harmful to human beings? The author will discuss moxibustion therapy based on these questions.

1 Artemisia Argyi’s Application in Daily life

Artemisia Argyi is used in a variety of ways and its history can be traced back to ancient times. The record of Artemisia Argyi was first found in the Book of Songs (Shi Jing), the first collection of poems in China, in the Spring and Autumn Period.
(770 B.C.-476 B.C.). In *Li Sao* created in Warring States Period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.), *Artemisia Argyi* was also mentioned. It indicates that this plant has been widely used in the daily life of Chinese people. *Artemisia Argyi* is edible. Its cooking methods and functions were first introduced in *Shi Liao Ben Cao* (written by MENG Xian, Tang Dynasty), and it can be used to make pastry or decoction against trauma, metrorrhagia, cholera, and bleeding during pregnancy.

During spring in the southern area of China, *Artemisia Argyi* is a commonly seen in food. After rinsing, peering off stem and dead leaves, people mix *Artemisia Argyi* with flour in specific proportions to make steamed bread, dumplings, cakes, or mixed with rice to make sticky rice cakes. It can also be processed into tea or wine. In rural areas, *Artemisia Argyi* is smoldered for sterilization in the labor room, as it can purify air, drive away mosquitoes, kill bacteria, molds and viruses. On Dragon-Boat Festival, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, people will counteract evil forces or poisonous substance by hanging up the plant, or taking or bathing in its decoction.

### 2 Moxa’s Application in Medical Activities

Moxa is the dried leaves of *Artemisia Argyi*. It’s picked in summer before blossom, dried in sunshine. It’s soft and fragrant, bitter and spicy in taste, warm and a little bit poisonous in nature, entering the meridians of liver, spleen and kidney. It can activate the release of cold and pain, warm meridians and stop bleeding, so it’s used in the management of cold pain in the lower abdomen, sterility or irregular menstruation due to cold retained in meridians or uterus, hematemesis, rhinorrhagia, metrorrhagia, bleeding during pregnancy, and external application for pruritus cutanea, 3-9 g being the common dose. The first record of moxa used in medical ways was in the *Wu Shi Er Bing Fang* (Fifty-two Prescriptions) written around the Warring States Period. It was also mentioned in the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor’s Inner Cannon). In *Ben Cao Gang Mu* (the Compendium of Materia Medica), it said that the moxa was bitter, slightly warm, nonpoisonous in nature, activating both descending and ascending directions, belonging to yang and entering the meridians of spleen, liver and kidney. People in previous times considered the moxa to be poisonous. But the author LI Shi-zhen confuted this view in this book. He believed that the side and adverse effects after taking moxa was not from the herb itself but from taking it in excess. It has enrolled 52 prescriptions with composition of moxa in *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. For example, the famous prescription *Jiao Ai Si Wu Tang* was used for metrorrhagia, bleeding during pregnancy, and *Ai Fu Nuan Gong Wan* for irregular menstruation, dysmenorrheal and lumbar pain during menstruation period, and sterility due to cold retained in uterus.

### 3 Moxa’s Application in Moxibustion

It’s been a long history for moxa being used in moxibustion therapy. Ever since the time of *Ling Shu* (Spiritual Pivot), moxa had been used for moxibustion and the word *Ai* (*Artemisia Argyi*) was used in place of *Jiu* (moxibustion), thus forming up the word *Ai Jiu* (moxibustion therapy) we are using today. In ancient time, besides moxa, other herbs such as mulberry twig and peach branchlet were also used for moxibustion therapy. These materials were gradually eliminated for all kinds of limitations. However, moxa has survived and developed after selection of several thousands of years. To analyze the reason, it’s not only related to its healing function and fragrance, but also its ability to ignite, to burn thoroughly, and its good kindling function.

In clinical practice, moxibustion therapy is not supplied directly with the leaf, but with the moxa stick or moxa cone made by processed moxa fluff. The aged moxa fluff is usually considered to be the best for moxibustion therapy as the heat produced by the fresh moxa is too strong for the therapy.

### 4 Chemical Compositions, Pharmacological Effects and Clinical Application of Moxa’s Essential Oil

JIN Ran et al. extracted oil from *Artemisia Argyi* leaves of different ages with steam distillation, and adopted GC-MS technique to determine the nature for semi-quantitative analysis. It detected the same contents of high concentration, such as eudesmol, thujone, chrysanthene, camphor,