

Fertility - How Acupuncture Helps

By Toni Eatros, MS, Dipl Ac, AP

More and more we hear about couples having difficulty conceiving a baby. The causes of this are many and the numerous medical treatment options can be overwhelming. The treatment of infertility with acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) dates back 2000 years. These ancient, time-tested techniques improve fertility rates and support a woman's whole body, unlocking unlimited potential for health, healing and childbearing.

The National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization are two organizations who recognize that acupuncture is effective in the treatment of over 50 western medical diseases, disorders and symptoms, including infertility.

Researchers from Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York reviewed recent studies and concluded that acupuncture helps to regulate the menstrual cycle, which is the single most important factor when trying to get pregnant. Acupuncture also normalizes hormone levels responsible for ovulation, especially in women with polycystic ovarian syndrome. It also increases blood flow to the uterus, which improves the chances of implantation. The hormones that are secreted during stressful situations can significantly decrease fertility. Research has shown that acupuncture can reduce stress and anxiety, thereby decreasing the stress hormones and their detrimental effect on the body.

Acupuncture is an affordable alternative to IVF or can be used as an adjunct to IVF. In a 2007 study, researchers found that acupuncture may improve the quality of life in patients undergoing IVF. It was also found that women receiving acupuncture reported significantly less abdominal pain, other pain, nausea, and stress two hours after oocyte aspiration (egg collection) compared to women receiving conventional analgesia only.

According to the theories of acupuncture and TCM, infertility is caused by an imbalance of Qi and blood affecting the healthy functioning of one or more of the organ systems. Keep in mind the organs described here reflect Chinese medical theories and philosophies and are not the same organs that Western medicine discusses. Acupuncture and TCM can raise the fertility potential of women by affecting the quality, quantity, balance and flow of the Qi and blood.

The release of an egg during ovulation is controlled by the kidneys in TCM theory. The kidneys also create a substance called Jing Qi, which is essential for a healthy body, mind, and pregnancy.

The free flow of Qi and blood throughout the body is essential to conceiving and maintaining a healthy pregnancy. The liver is in charge of this function. When the liver is out of balance, the menstrual cycle is usually negatively affected and possible infertility can result.

The spleen is another very important organ system vital for reproduction according to TCM philosophy. An adequate supply of blood is required to sustain a normal menstrual cycle and normal, healthy pregnancy. Disharmony of the spleen can result in inadequate supply of blood and accumulation of dampness in the body. Dampness manifests as cysts, fibroids, and tumors.

As you can see, from a TCM perspective there are several different diagnosis for infertility. No two people are alike. During the initial exam, the pulse is taken, the tongue is looked at and the ear may be inspected and palpated, and a full health history is taken. All aspects of the patient are considered when formulating an individualized diagnosis and effective treatment plan.

Utilizing the same treatment plan and approach to each of the above described imbalances would yield poor results. Part of the power of Traditional Chinese Medicine is that patterns are diagnosed and the treatment plan to correct the imbalance is based on those patterns. Three different women could come to the office for infertility treatment and leave having had different acupuncture points, different dietary recommendations given and different herbal formulas prescribed. This holistic approach to infertility yields a higher success rate than our current medical model of fertility treatments. Actual clinical IVF success rates with highly educated practitioners are reported to be 70% and higher, as opposed to the typical IVF success rate of around 25%.

Acupuncture is an effective preventative medicine with no negative side-effects, only positive ones. Acupuncture is a completely natural therapy and works directly with the body's natural processes, not against them. No drugs are ever used. Invasive procedures and drug therapies used in Western treatment may produce undesirable side effects and accumulated toxicity in the body. Acupuncture does not have these side effects. In fact, feeling great is the most commonly reported result.

Acupuncture has been used to successfully treat millions of people over the past 3,000 years. It is an effective form of medical treatment that has evolved into a complete holistic health care system. As the old adage goes, "there is nothing to fear, but fear itself"! Acupuncture works and this safe, natural, drug-free way of whole body healing is worth a try!

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