

Health: Needles and twins

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By [Helen Bell](#)



HOLISTIC APPROACH: Caroline Haigh administers a treatment

A DISPLAY of 'thank you' cards lined up on the window sill of Caroline Haigh's tranquil treatment room are testament to her skills as an acupuncturist.

The moving messages from proud parents announce the births of their precious new babies and all convey their deep gratitude to Caroline, an accredited acupuncturist and practitioner in Traditional Chinese Medicine who specialises in fertility treatment.

The mother-of-two set up her practice based in Rawdon, Leeds, 13 years ago, after deciding on a career change from her job with social services.

Caroline, 45, specialises in treating men and women with fertility problems. In particular treating men with low sperm counts and women who have had difficulty conceiving, a history of miscarriage or are undergoing IVF.

"The 'thank you' cards are just lovely," said Caroline. "When a patient rings to say they have a positive result it is the best feeling in the world. I know how difficult the journey has been for most of the couples who come. It is emotionally very hard."

Despite new British Fertility Society guidelines issued earlier this year declaring there was no link to support the use of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine in fertility treatment, Caroline's anecdotal evidence tells a different story.

The guidelines found that there is currently no evidence that acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine increases the chances of success with IVF but previous studies have pointed to a 65 per success rate.

Anna Robson, 34, of Burley-in-Wharfedale, now has a four month old son Samuel, who was

conceived after acupuncture treatment with Caroline and she believes the two events are linked.

She and her husband Mark, a solicitor had been trying for two years to have a baby without success.

"When I came off the fertility drugs, Caroline gave me a traditional Chinese medicine prescription. I was on it for about three or four months when I got pregnant," said Anna, a patent administrator.

"When I found out I was pregnant I was in shock. I couldn't believe it. I had done so many tests which had all been negative in the past.

"Some people may say it's a coincidence but I don't. I was more relaxed when I saw Caroline. I felt that I was doing something, rather than waiting around for the NHS.

"It's fantastic being a mum and I still can't believe it."

Another of Caroline's patients, who already has a three year-old daughter following IVF treatment and acupuncture, has just given birth to a baby girl.

The 41-year-old professional woman from Harrogate began acupuncture after being diagnosed with endometriosis in 2001. She became pregnant both times after doctors put back embryos which had previously been frozen but has had a gruelling four rounds of IVF in total.

She said: "What I liked about the acupuncture was its holistic approach. It wasn't just a case of looking at your symptoms.

"The thing with IVF is that it goes against the grain of a natural pregnancy. I was taking drugs every day, injecting myself and my husband was injecting me. It was all so alien.

"The acupuncture felt like I was doing something positive and rebalancing myself. I always felt like IVF was a bit of a lottery and with Caroline the extra support through the IVF cycles made all the difference," she said.

Caroline said: "I am getting increasing numbers of people who come to me with menstrual irregularities or fertility problems. Couples have invested a lot emotionally and financially and they want to do anything they can to enhance their chances.

"One woman I am treating had five unsuccessful IVF attempts and after I began a course of acupuncture she is now 22 weeks pregnant.

"Another patient had one unsuccessful course of IVF and then tried acupuncture. The quality of her eggs and embryos were better and she became pregnant with twins.

"I have another two patients who in the last few weeks were due to start IVF and have fallen pregnant naturally," said Caroline.

"I would say I have treated more than 100 men with low sperm count and in all cases except

one, the man's sperm count rose after acupuncture treatment."

Low sperm count can be a contributing factor in couples having difficulty conceiving.

Acupuncture is an ancient, natural system which works by releasing and unblocking energy in the body along meridian lines, allowing the body to self-heal. Hair fine needles are placed at specific trigger points below the skin and left in place for up to half an hour and sometimes gentle heat or electrical stimulation is added.

It is a safe treatment for women in pregnancy or undergoing fertility treatment because there are no side effects.

Caroline is affiliated to the Zita West Network for Reproductive Health, a fertility group set up by celebrity midwife Zita West, who advised Hollywood star Kate Winslet and fashion designer Stella McCartney during their pregnancies.

It means Caroline has received training in the holistic approach used by Zita at her well respected London clinic – the largest and most successful integrated reproductive health practice in the UK.

A consultation and first treatment costs £44 and subsequent treatments costs £34.

- For more information contact Caroline on www.leedsacupuncture.co.uk or contact 0113 250 1826.

"It's not as costly as Botox or a facelift and it looks at your whole face and body"

ACUPUNCTURE can be used to fight the signs of ageing – without the side effects or associated cost of surgery or botox.

Caroline Haigh has more than 30 patients who come to her for what is called facial revitalisation – a treatment to dispel fine lines and reduce the appearance of even deep wrinkles.

Though Facial Rejuvenation Acupuncture can sometimes be referred to as an Acupuncture Facelift, it is more than a cosmetic procedure. It is a rejuvenation and revitalization process designed to help the whole body look and feel younger, says Caroline.

The fully qualified acupuncturist trained with Virginia Doran, a New York acupuncturist with a celebrity clientele, who has developed the specialism over the course of 20 years.

But the treatment has been in existence as early as the Sung Dynasty (960AD-1270AD) when acupuncture rejuvenation practices were employed for the Empress and the Emperor's concubines.

Scores of ultra fine needles are skilfully inserted all over the face and head – anywhere showing the signs of ageing and left in for around 20 minutes.

Caroline offers a 12 week treatment and then patients attend for a monthly maintenance session.

It works says the expert because with the insertion of the 6mm long needles, the body perceives it has had an injury and consequently directs blood flow and collagen – the substance which adds plumpness and elasticity to the skin – to the area.

"It offers a whole face treatment while botox only works on a specific area of the face," said Caroline. "Patients' complexions are tighter and softer.

"I have people who have had Botox and collagen fillers and then come to me and they say they wouldn't go back to anything like that now they have discovered this treatment

"It is effective and it has very few side effects – a patient might occasionally get a tiny bruise. It's not as costly as Botox or a facelift and it looks at your whole face and body. You feel better and you look better."

Polly, 66, one of Caroline's patients originally went for acupuncture because of back pain but was excited by the idea of slowing down the ageing process.

"I'm really pleased with the effect. Some of my wrinkles have gone, it has got rid of the fine lines above my upper lip, my skin feels more plumped up and I haven't got so many crow's feet around my eyes. I like to look after myself and for me it's worth the money," she said.

Fitness instructor Paula Walton, of Beeston, Leeds, is another advocate of the treatment, after researching different anti-ageing treatments.

"I wasn't looking for a facelift; I wanted something more natural. After the treatment your face looks brighter. It's a subtle rather than dramatic effect," said Paula, a grandmother and mother of-three grown up children.

"What I like about it is that it's non-invasive and although the needles can be a little painful at first, it is very relaxing. I just drift off for half an hour."

Caroline makes individual consultation and tailors treatment accordingly. Treatment costs from £45 to £80 a session.