

HOW ACUPUNCTURE CAN BOOST YOUR FERTILITY

WHAT IS ACUPUNCTURE? Acupuncture is based on a system of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) which dates back over 3,000 years. Fine needles are inserted at points around the body to correct imbalance in energy or *qi*, which in TCM is said to flow around the body in channels or meridians. It is used to treat a number of diverse conditions including male and female infertility, anxiety, lower back pain and nausea. Acupuncturists believe there are 500 different acupuncture points in the body and stimulation with tiny needles can get energy flowing again.

HOW CAN IT BOOST MY FERTILITY? Essentially acupuncturists try to rebalance energy flow and 'prime' the body for fertility and conception. Treatments are tailored for each individual.

Although mainstream medics argue that no meridians exist physically in the body and there isn't any solid scientific evidence that it can help in infertility, some believe acupuncture may still be beneficial because it stimulates nerve and muscle tissue – and it also induces relaxation - although most say more research is needed to prove this.

WHAT SORT OF PROBLEMS CAN ACUPUNCTURE HELP WITH?

The British Acupuncture Council argues that from research done so far there are three main ways acupuncture may help with female fertility problems.

- **BY REGULATING HORMONE FUNCTION:** Acupuncture stimulates a chain of hormone reactions by promoting the release of a chemical in the brain called beta-endorphin.
- **INCREASING BLOOD FLOW TO THE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS :** Acupuncture can stimulate blood flow to the ovaries for instance and help create the right environment for an egg follicle to develop. Acupuncturists also argue that acupuncture can increase blood flow to the uterus and help thicken the lining making it more likely that an egg will implant.
- **TACKLING THE CAUSES OF POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME (PCOS):** PCOS is a common cause of infertility in women – it is caused by high levels of the male sex hormone testosterone and this causes small cysts to grow on the ovaries and can also cause an irregular cycle and weight gain. Acupuncture aims to reduce the symptoms of PCOS by balancing hormone levels, reducing the number of cysts, regulating periods and stimulating ovulation.

You can read the research this is based upon in a free fact sheet on female fertility available to download from the British Acupuncture Council at www.acupuncture.org.uk

HOW MAY ACUPUNCTURE HELP MY PARTNER?

The British Acupuncture Council says there is evidence to show that acupuncture increases sperm motility (how fast sperm swim) and can also lower the temperature in the scrotum where sperm are stored, plus it increases levels of the male sex hormone testosterone and improves sperm maturation.

Again the research to back up these claims is available on a fact sheet to download from www.acupuncture.org.uk

ACUPUNCTURE DURING FERTILITY TREATMENT

Some IVF clinics now have acupuncturists working at their clinics or refer patients as it reduces stress levels, helps regulate hormones and increases blood flow to the ovaries and uterus. Many patients also consult acupuncturists privately.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A CONSULTATION? Acupuncturists usually take a full medical history including details of your menstrual cycle etc. The first appointment may last as long as an hour to an hour and a half. You may be asked to lie on a couch and then have fine needles inserted. Subsequent appointments last between 30 and 60 minutes on average. You may also be given advice about your diet and lifestyle.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? Acupuncture for fertility problems is not available on the NHS. Expect to pay anything from £25 to £40 per hour.

<EXPERT COMMENT>

Acupuncturist Caroline Haigh from Leeds says there are several common health problems in TCM that affect female fertility. One of the most common is **YIN DEFICIENCY**.

‘Symptoms such as infrequent periods, short cycles, and hot flushes can be an indication of ovarian ageing,’ says Caroline. ‘This can be a sign that the ovaries are starting to struggle. The aim of treatment is to lower levels of FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) and improve the quality of her eggs.’

‘Acupuncture can also be useful in IVF treatment pre and post transfer as it speeds up blood flow to the uterus and helps patients relax.’

<MUM’S COMMENT> Debbie, 34, says: ‘I’ve been having acupuncture alongside my IVF treatment and I’m now 16 weeks pregnant. I’m convinced it helped prime my body for pregnancy and also helped me relax through what was an incredibly stressful time’

WHERE CAN I FIND AN ACUPUNCTURIST? To find a qualified practitioner contact the British Acupuncture Council on 0208 735 0400 or go to www.acupuncture.org.uk