

Acupuncture and fertility

Research suggests that acupuncture can increase the chances of conceiving successfully (both naturally and through IVF) as it prepares the body for conception and pregnancy. Acupuncturist **Maria Maher** explains how this ancient Chinese therapy could help to boost fertility

With one in every six couples experiencing difficulty in becoming parents nowadays, it is not surprising that more and more people are turning to acupuncture for help. Acupuncture, a branch of medicine that originated in China, has been used for centuries to treat fertility issues. The W.H.O. (World Health Organisation) recognises its effectiveness in doing so and there have been several studies showing that it is safe and effective in treating fertility and infertility, as well as menstrual/reproductive issues, for both men and women.

How does acupuncture help?

There are many ways in which acupuncture can assist.

> It can increase the blood flow to the reproductive organs, balance hormones, improve the quality of eggs, sperm and embryos, help prevent miscarriage and help relieve the stress that trying for a baby can too often cause.

> For couples who are trying to conceive with the help of Assisted Reproductive Techniques (ART, i.e.: IVF, IUI, ovulation induction), acupuncture will complement the conventional treatment they are having and/or the medications they are prescribed. Acupuncture on the day of embryo transfer (pre- and post-transfer) has been shown to increase the success of IVF by as much as 65%.

> Acupuncture also helps men and women who have conditions that affect their fertility. For women, these include conditions such as Polycystic Ovaries (PCO), Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis, thyroid

issues, ovulation issues, irregular menstrual cycles or low ovarian reserve. It can be beneficial for men who have issues such as low sperm count, poor sperm morphology or varicoceles.

Tailored treatment

In Chinese medicine, the body is viewed as one whole energy system and, as such, the root cause of a condition is treated, as well as the symptoms experienced. It works at an emotional, spiritual and physical level. Each condition has its own diagnosis in terms of traditional Chinese medicine and no individual is treated in the same way. A lot of emphasis is placed on diet and lifestyle and recommendations are made as appropriate.

A.C.T. (Acupuncture Childbirth Team) Dublin is a group of established and registered acupuncturists, which was formed in response to the growing number of patients using acupuncture for fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and paediatrics. The group works alongside, and in collaboration with, the fertility, maternity and paediatric services provided within Dublin. A.C.T. Dublin aims to support both members and their patients in promoting acupuncture and TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) to the public and other healthcare providers. It was officially launched in January 2014 by its patron, Sarah Budd, an internationally renowned acupuncturist and midwife.

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Mum's Story

Aisling, age 36, had acupuncture because she was finding it difficult to get pregnant due to her underlying endometriosis condition. "I had been trying to conceive for over eight months. I had already been diagnosed with endometriosis and had had a laparoscopy to remove it. Some months later, I became pregnant. However, I was terribly upset when I miscarried after only a few weeks. I decided to have a course of acupuncture treatments to help me get over the miscarriage and hopefully improve my chances of conceiving again when I was emotionally ready to try. I found the treatments very relaxing and calming. I began to feel better in myself and I was sleeping much better too. Meanwhile, my GP had referred me to a fertility clinic, where the specialists discussed IVF with me as a recommended option. To my delight, however, during the course of the acupuncture treatments, and before starting any medication the fertility clinic had prescribed, I discovered I was pregnant! I continued to have acupuncture during my pregnancy and am now the proud mother of a little girl!"

More info...

Maria Maher, is a member of A.C.T. (Acupuncture Childbirth Team) Dublin. For more about her and other A.C.T. Dublin team members, please visit 'The Team' page on www.actdublin.ie