



Boost Your Fertility Naturally with Acupuncture & Herbs

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With the stresses of modern life and the trend toward waiting longer to start a family, it is quite common for couples to have a hard time getting pregnant. In fact, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in eight couples have difficulty getting pregnant or maintaining a pregnancy. About 12 percent of women have received infertility services, according to the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth.

There are many options available for couples facing fertility challenges. While it is always wise to receive a Western medical evaluation to understand the source of the problem, as well as the time sensitivity of treatment options, many couples also use Chinese medicine to optimize fertility naturally while also addressing the underlying issue.

How does it work?

Chinese medicine is one of the oldest systems of medicine in the world and has been used to treat infertility for thousands of years. Possible mechanisms include:

- Directly increasing blood flow to the uterus and ovaries
- Improving the lining of the uterus
- Improving sperm quality and quantity
- Regulating hormones
- Inducing regular ovulation
- Improving implantation
- Reducing stress, anxiety, and depression
- Addressing underlying health issues

Conditions treated

Many health issues can impact fertility. About a third of infertility cases are due to issues with the male partner; one-third arise from issues with the female; and a third are caused by issues with both the man and the woman or cannot be explained, according to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.



In addition to increasing overall health, acupuncture and herbs can also improve reproductive health. In men, Chinese medicine can address low sperm count, as well as sperm quality and motility. Chinese medicine can help address specific fertility issues in women in addition to underlying gynecological problems, such as fibroids, endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), elevated follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), amenorrhea, ovulatory disorders, and pelvic inflammatory disease. Chinese medicine can also be helpful for women with mild blockage of the fallopian tubes or with a history of recurrent miscarriage.

Unexplained infertility

With its unique system of diagnosis and treatment, Chinese medicine has a particularly important role to play when the diagnosis is unexplained infertility. Using a holistic framework, the practitioner can detect and address subtle imbalances that aren't considered in conventional medicine. Judiciously integrating both Eastern and Western medicine can improve both partners' health and increase the likelihood of conception and a successful pregnancy.

What's the process?

After a thorough review of your health and any medical records from your gynecologist/fertility specialist, the Chinese medicine practitioner will focus on the woman's gynecological history and menstrual cycle. This will include questions about the length of the menstrual cycle, as well as issues such as painful, irregular or heavy periods, or bleeding between periods. To detect subtle dysfunctions within the cycle, and track progress, patients are often asked to chart their basal body temperature (BBT).

The acupuncturist will create a customized treatment plan based on the patient's specific issues. For women, treatment will typically consist of weekly acupuncture sessions and may also include herbal medicine tailored to each phase of her cycle. For men, treatment tends to be simpler and may focus primarily on herbal medicine, along with occasional acupuncture treatment. Lifestyle recommendations, including suggestions for nutrition, exercise, stress management, and sleep, will likely be provided.

The acupuncturist may recommend classic herbal formulas or may customize a formula to more specifically meet the individual's needs.



Herbal medicine can have a significant impact on fertility. A recent systematic review showed a two-fold improvement of pregnancy rates with the use of Chinese herbal medicine, as compared to in vitro fertilization (IVF) or fertility drugs, over a four-month period.

What if I'm doing IVF or using fertility drugs?

While Chinese medicine can be used to improve reproductive health and increase the chance for natural conception, acupuncture is also commonly used in conjunction with conventional fertility treatment. Many systematic reviews support the benefits of acupuncture for IVF. Acupuncture can also be used to decrease the side effects of fertility drugs and to help relieve the stress and anxiety that often accompanies fertility treatment. Wherever you are on your fertility journey, you can benefit from the addition of Chinese medicine.

Finding a qualified practitioner

To ensure your acupuncturist meets and maintains rigorous national standards for education, supervised training, and ongoing professional

development, look for certification by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM). "Dipl. Ac" represents board certification in acupuncture, and "Dipl. OM" represents board certification in both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. You may also want to ask about any additional training in fertility acupuncture.

Whether as a stand-alone approach or used in conjunction with conventional treatment, Chinese medicine is a powerful therapy for naturally enhancing your fertility.

Dr. Virginia Mims specializes in natural women's health and wellness. Nationally board certified in both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine (NCCAOM), she earned her doctorate from Pacific College of Oriental Medicine. She is a Certified Menopause Practitioner (NCMP) through the North American Menopause Society, the leading organization for women's health at midlife and beyond. Dr. Mims trained in oncology acupuncture through Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and she holds a bachelor's in psychology from Duke University.



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