

August 21, 2006

## **Acupuncture Proven to Increase Chances of Getting Pregnant**

**Studies show acupuncture increases Assisted Reproductive Therapy (ART) success by 15 percent. An examination of increased fertility when used alone or when complementing ART**

By Kate Ruma, MAOM, LAc.

For a couple trying to conceive, the diagnosis of infertility is often heart-wrenching information that takes an emotional toll, is physically traumatic, and brings financial burdens. The stress of infertility very often leaves couples looking for more control over the factors that promote or inhibit their chances of conceiving. The search to become pregnant, for many, becomes highly charged, distressing for both partners, and physically exhausting. Infertility may cost couples their peace of mind and the dream of having a family. The financial consequences often go beyond the predicted expenses of conceiving naturally.

Acupuncture is a successful tool that treats the root cause of infertility, increases in vitro fertilization (IVF) and intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) success and prepares men and women for pregnancy. A study published in 2002 shows that acupuncture treatment administered 25 minutes before and 25 minutes after IVF treatment increased success of pregnancy by 15 percent. This form of medicine is being used in numerous progressive infertility clinics across the U.S. with tangible results. Acupuncture, in conjunction with IVF, greatly enhances a woman's chances of conception.

According to the American Society for Reproductive Science, over 6.1 million or 10 percent of women in the United States are diagnosed as being infertile, which is defined as one year of unsuccessful conception. Women who choose to conceive after the age of 35 have a greater chance of having medical difficulties that may result in infertility issues. Due to career choices, as well as other extraneous factors, which include dietary and exercise habits, years of birth control pill use and an increasingly stressful modern life, these numbers will likely increase and a greater portion of the population will be affected by infertility in the future.

The causes of infertility are vast and varied. Some of the main factors that may prevent successful conception include: lack of ovulation, poor quality of eggs, thin endometrial lining, poor quality and number of follicles, low progesterone, high follicle stimulating hormone, blocked fallopian tubes, uterine fibroids, ovarian cysts, endometriosis, adhesions, infections and stress. Modern medicine treats these problems with surgery or medications or both. If surgery and modern medications fail, assisted reproductive therapies (ART), including IVF, ICSI or others, may be used. These procedures involve the manipulation of the egg, sperm or both to increase the chances of conception.

Despite the advances of modern medicine in reproductive health and the ability of doctors to extract eggs and manipulate sperm to create an embryo, the success rates of these ARTs are quite minimal. According to the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology and the Center for Disease Control these methods are only 30 percent effective with each procedure, leaving a majority of couples with continued emotional anguish and financial burden. Often women must undergo several IVF and ICSI treatments. According to Dr. Lifang Liang, an expert in infertility in the field of Chinese medicine, women around the age of 40 who have successful ART procedures suffer miscarriages 50 percent of the time. These couples find themselves elated when they become pregnant but later devastated by the loss of the pregnancy. For many women this loss may happen repeatedly, thereby compounding the emotional, physical and financial costs.

If IVF fails repeatedly or if miscarriage occurs, then according to modern medicine, these patients have exhausted their options of having their own biological child. They are left emotionally devastated and have endured a physically excruciating path only to reach this disappointing reality. Fortunately, at this crossroad, these couples can still find success in hormone free, non-invasive, time-tested traditional acupuncture.

In summary, acupuncture offers a cost-effective, safe, and comprehensive intervention for women who want to become pregnant. Acupuncture is proven effective for men and women who wish to prepare their bodies for conception, pregnancy, and delivery, even those who have not experienced difficulties with infertility. Similarly, women who do not wish to undergo IVF for a variety of reasons, also choose acupuncture as an effective mode of treatment. Finally, acupuncture can be integrated with ART to enhance effectiveness.

### **Who can benefit from acupuncture?**

Three groups of people are typically treated:

1. Couples, either the man or the woman or both, wanting to integrate acupuncture with ARTs to increase significantly the success rate of conception.
2. Couples, either the man or the woman or both, who have chosen to follow a non-synthetic path toward conception.
3. Couples, who have not officially been diagnosed with infertility, but who hope to conceive more quickly, either the man or the woman or both, who have decided to begin trying to get pregnant.

### **What should I expect from an acupuncture visit?**

Since the mind and body are so intricately intertwined, it is critical to assess the patient's overall health, both emotional and physical. The focus of the initial visit is the patient's past medical issues and the main infertility issue. In order to gain a clear view of a patient's total health, specific information is gathered including lifestyle, exercise habits, work habits, stress releasers, dietary habits, and sensitivity to both weather changes and temperature.

In Chinese medicine, a significant part of assessment and diagnosis is examining a patient's tongue and palpating the pulse. Since the tongue is the only external muscle in the body, the color of the tongue is critical to completing the picture of the patient's overall health, as it gives information about blood flow, energy levels, and body fluid balance. The tongue's coating indicates the condition of the bodily fluids and digestive state. Taking the pulse appears similar to a western doctor's approach; however, Eastern medicine finds 12 different pulses - six felt on the superficial level and six felt on a deeper level - that will indicate metabolic processes in the body.

Since the root causes of infertility differ from one patient to the next, tongue and pulse diagnoses give a solid understanding of the root causes of infertility and therefore aid in creating an individual treatment plan for the woman, the man, or both members of the couple.

The needles used during treatment are as thin as a strand of hair. When the needles are tapped into the surface of the body, the slight sensation may feel like a fingernail being tapped on the skin. Once the needles are in place, patients relax and often fall asleep. Treatments last a half hour and a course of treatment to relieve infertility issues typically ranges from 12 to 20 sessions.

The cost of an acupuncture treatment ranges on average from \$50 to \$90, and typically patients pay slightly more for the initial intake. This is a small fee considering the benefits acupuncture can provide to increase

chances of having a child naturally. Likewise, for those who have spent an average of \$40,000 dollars on ART treatments, using acupuncture to increase the odds of getting pregnancy and carrying a pregnancy to full term is money well spent.

### **Infertility Success Stories:**

#### **Acupuncture in Conjunction with IVF:**

Maureen, a 42 year-old woman, had exhausted IVF and was told it was her last time any IVF clinic would accept her. She started acupuncture along side IVF and told herself she would give it a last-ditch effort to conceive. Maureen began treatment while she took shots of Pergonal and Gonal-F, hormones used to produce more follicles, which in turn produce more eggs. Her follicle count doubled after three acupuncture treatments.

Then just prior to egg retrieval during IVF, Maureen was treated with acupuncture to relax the cervix and increase blood flow to the uterus. As a result, her egg retrieval went successfully without dangerous cramping and discomfort. Maureen received acupuncture treatments before and after the IVF procedure in order to again increase blood flow to her uterus, regulate her hormones, and help the embryo successfully attach to the wall of her uterus.

Two weeks after the embryo transfer, Maureen was pregnant. Since women over the age of 40 have a 50 percent chance of miscarriage, she continued acupuncture treatments during her first trimester in order to strengthen her constitution and carry the baby to full term.

This story is typical of patients with fertility issues. Before having acupuncture, Maureen had had four unsuccessful IVF treatments and four miscarriages. With the help of acupuncture treatments, Maureen was finally able to have a successful IVF transfer, and at age 42, she was successful in carrying a baby boy to full term.

#### **Acupuncture Aiding Infertility Due to Endometriosis:**

Ann, a 32 year-old woman who had been trying to get pregnant for two years, had been diagnosed with endometriosis several years before. However, her infertility doctor concluded her uterus was clear from endometriosis and she had the physiological ability to become pregnant. To enhance these chances, he suggested acupuncture.

During her initial exam, she reported that each month she was debilitated by symptoms which included clots, cramps, spotting, and dark menstrual blood. She often had to stay home from work and was using ibuprofen to manage the pain. According to Chinese medicine, her blood flow was impeded and therefore was not circulating to the uterus correctly. This lack of blood flow was the cause of her infertility and was the root cause of her endometriosis as well. The monthly pains were the manifestations of her impeded blood flow.

After two months of weekly acupuncture treatments, her periods were normalized and the spotting before her period, clots, and cramps were resolved. The menstrual blood became a fresh red in color. It was evident from these changes that the blood flow to the uterus had increased and created a more advantageous environment for an embryo to implant.

Ann became pregnant two months after finishing her acupuncture treatments. She did not resort to ART treatments, and through acupuncture both her period and hormone levels were regulated.

#### **Acupuncture for Wellness in Conception:**

Michele was a patient who came to the clinic because she had heard that acupuncture is a proven tool to prepare for pregnancy. She was not having trouble getting pregnant, nor did she believe she was infertile. Rather, she hoped to balance her body prior to becoming pregnant.

She was experiencing some digestive issues such as acid regurgitation and bloating. She also led a stressful life with very few moments of the day left to rest and relax. With treatment she began to understand the importance of strengthening her digestion and reducing stress.

First, she needed to have a strong digestive system in order to properly break down the food she was consuming. Proper digestion would ensure that she was nourishing her system properly and nourishing the uterine lining properly.

Secondly, after she became pregnant the nausea and vomiting associated with morning sickness would be mitigated because women who have weak digestion tend to get morning sickness. After 10 treatments, Michele's digestion was stronger as evidenced by lack of both acid regurgitation and bloating symptoms. She felt more peaceful after she learned to take 20 minutes for herself and to release the stress of the day. After a course of treatment, Michele felt ready to try to get pregnant knowing she was truly healthy.

These case studies are actual stories demonstrating the success of acupuncture in infertile couples both independently and in conjunction with modern Western medicine. While the patients identifying details have been changed in order to protect their privacy, the clinical material is a culmination of the author's professional experience.

Cutting-edge health care clinics are infusing Eastern and Western practices in order to cure infertility. The references listed at the conclusion of the article outline some of the most current research that strongly supports acupuncture as a remedy for infertility.

When used alone or to enhance ARTs, acupuncture has proven for centuries, and more recently in the context of modern medicine, to be an effective treatment for medical issues causing reproductive difficulties. Chinese medicine can serve as an enormous help to those who wish to conceive more easily while bringing the body safely and naturally into balance. More and more patients are becoming aware of the benefits acupuncture has to offer them in their quest for starting a healthy family.

#### *Resources*

1. Paulus WE, Zhang M, Strehler E, et al. "Influence of acupuncture on the pregnancy rate in patients who undergo assisted reproduction therapy." *Fertility and Sterility* 2002; 77:721-724.
2. Xuefen, C. "Substitution of Acupuncture for HCG in Ovulation Induction". *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*. 1997; 17(2): 119-121.
3. Stener-Victorin, Waldenstrom, Andersson, Wikland. "Reduction of blood flow impedance in the uterine arteries of infertile women with electro-acupuncture." *Human Reproduction*. 1996; 6:171-181.
4. Gerhard, P. "Auricular Acupuncture in the treatment of female infertility." *Endocrinology* 1992; 6: 171-181.
5. Siterman, Eltes, Wolfson, et al. "Effect of Acupuncture on parameters of male suffering from subfertility related to low sperm quality." *Archives of Andrology* 1997; 39: 155-161.



Page printed from:

[http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=31364&no\\_paginate=true&no\\_b=true](http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=31364&no_paginate=true&no_b=true)