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# How Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Helps Infertility

Xiaoji Jenny Li      B. Acu (China), M. Hs (NZ), PhD Acu (China)

Infertility is a global problem in both westernized and less developed countries. Increasingly women are experiencing lower rates of birth in their child bearing years. Unfortunately this is a problem that is expected to get worse, due to the increase in maternal age, obesity, smoking, gynecological diseases, and lifestyle factors including poor diet, lack of sleep and increased stress. Environmental factors including chemical exposure and radiation can also play a part.

Allopathic medical treatments for infertility are called Assisted Reproductive Therapies (ART), which refers to drugs, e.g. Clomiphene Citrate to increase ovulation, simple or stimulated Intra Uterine Insemination (IUI) and as a last resort IVF.

These methods can be quite costly, stressful for the couple and have unstable success rates per cycle of treatment. ART also commonly results in severe complications including internal bleeding, infections, multiple births and Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome (OHSS) which can be life threatening (Delvigne & Rozenberg, 2003).

Acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine have been used effectively for female and male infertility for thousands of years. Today acupuncture is making its way into the mainstream as an effective, scientifically justified fertility treatment. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Acupuncture, facilitate fertility through a holistic approach in which both the physical and mental aspects of the individual are acknowledged and treated.

In concepts of Chinese gynecology, women is made of blood and all the female functions including period, pregnancy, birth and breast feeding are relying on abundant supply and good flow of blood. While the “Kidney” is regarded as the “root of life” that governs human’s conception, birth, growth, aging and death. The living status of humans at each stage of their lives, are expressions of both the functions of Kidney and balances of body essence that is stored in Kidney. In other words, only when

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Kidney is functioning normally with profuse balance of essence, the person is able to maintain his/her own development in a healthy way and reproduce.

Kidney Essence is composed of Congenital Essence that inherited from one's parents, and Acquired Essence that produced by the person's own body using the sources of fresh air inhaled to the Lung, combined with food essence being transferred by the Spleen. Kidney essence is the fundamental substance responsible for people's sexual and conceptive abilities including gonadal genesis, development of secondary sexual characteristics and pregnancy. In addition, the main function of Kidney is storing the essence and controlling its release to support all procreative activities.

Based on the TCM conception of human reproduction, people who have depleted Kidney Essence will be going through fertility difficulties; oppositely, for therapies that increase the quantity of Kidney essence and improve the quality of Kidney functions will promote fertility, such as acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine.

### **So how does acupuncture work?**

Fine needles are inserted at points around your body to correct imbalance in energy (Qi/ Chi) and blood, and maintain normal flows of energy and blood around your body within the 'channel' system. Acupuncturists aim rebalance your energy flow and prime your body for fertility.

According to the British Acupuncture Council, female fertility is increased by doing three key things:

1. Regulates fertility hormones by promoting the release of beta-endorphin in the brain, which affects the release of GnRH by the hypothalamus, FSH from the pituitary gland, oestrogen and progesterone levels from the ovary (Johansson et al., 2013; Lim & Wong, 2010);
2. Improves blood flow to the ovaries, enhancing the environment in which ovarian follicles develop. It also increases blood flow to the uterus, improving the thickness of the endometrial lining and increasing the chances of embryo implantation (Maughan, 2012; Elisabet Stener-Victorin et al., 2003);
3. Generally helps to relieve stress, anxiety, depression and other emotional disorders that disrupts the function of the hypothalamic pituitary-ovarian axis (HPOA), causing hormonal

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imbalances that can negatively impact fertility (E. Stener-Victorin, Jedel, & Janson, 2009; E. Stener-Victorin et al., 2000).

In more specific circumstances, acupuncture has been proven to work on two of the common causes of infertility; Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis (Lund & Lundeberg, 2016; Ren, Guo, Ma, & Zhang, 2014; Shen, Wu, Shu, Zhao, & Gao, 2015).

There is now a body of evidence to demonstrate that the use of acupuncture on its own or in combination with ART, is not only significantly increasing the success rate of pregnancy, but also saving women from undergoing repetitive cycles of ART and its potential complications. Because Acupuncture is non-invasive and relatively inexpensive when compared to other therapies e.g. IUI or IVF, seeking help with Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture should be your first step when treating infertility.

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