

EVERYTHING

YOU NEED TO KNOW

TO BOOST YOUR FERTILITY

Naturally



CENTRE OF BALANCE

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INTRODUCTION

As the average age of parenthood gets pushed out further and further, more couples are having trouble starting their own family. There are many methods of treatment for fertility issues, most of which are known to be **stressful** and **expensive**. For just ONE cycle of In Vitro Fertilisation treatment you could be out of pocket **\$10,000 - \$15,000** dollars with no guarantee of a successful pregnancy. The treatment also requires the patient to take multiple different drugs with awful side effects like nausea, irritability, dizziness and many more. All of this on top of the stress and emotional strain of dealing with infertility can be extremely overwhelming.

With Traditional Chinese medicine, there are **no drugs involved** – you may be prescribed some natural herbs if your practitioner thinks it would benefit you. There are also **no invasive procedures**, all treatment is external and focuses on stimulating blood circulation through acupuncture, acupressure and heat therapy to **promote fertility**. Our clinic is a very **relaxing environment**, we like to make sure you are comfortable to decrease stress and tension as much as possible, which is vital when trying to conceive.

Traditional Chinese Medicine places great importance on **harmonizing** the body and bringing it back to its **natural rhythm** that gets thrown out of balance

through daily life. To have a healthy pregnancy, you need a healthy body. To provide your baby with the best start and opportunity to grow you need to make sure that their environment – your body! – is in **optimal condition**.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

One of the main theories that traditional Chinese medicine practitioners guide their treatment through is the theory of the Five Zhang Organs which states that **all organs are connected** together in an intricate cycle. Each of these organs govern over certain areas of health, wellbeing and elements of our universe. For example, the **heart** is related to **blood circulation** and the **kidneys** control the **reproductive system**. This is why, for fertility treatment, an acupuncturist will usually pay special attention to the acupuncture points that relate directly to the heart and the kidneys, but it all depends on your own specific needs.

The second theory the practitioner will also use is guiding treatment through **Syndrome differentiation** to find out what **excesses** and **deficiencies** you have in order to determine the best course of treatment for you. For example, you can have a deficiency or excess of yin, yang, cold, or heat and the problem could be internal or external. Deficiency can be treated by nourishment and excess and be treated through purging. For example, if you have excess heat in your body, it should be treated with cold-natured herbs.

To find out what it is you are lacking or have an excess of, or what your “syndrome” is, the practitioner will ask you questions about every aspect of your health and lifestyle. This includes **sleeping patterns, bowel motions, appetite and diet**. A syndrome can be understood as a specific group of symptoms. Everything to do with what you’re feeling and experiencing; be it irritated, depressed, or even having a bitter taste in your mouth, is all important to note. Symptoms reflect illness, and this information is extremely important to a practitioner of Chinese medicine. The practitioner will also collect data from the patient through their own examinations of the patient’s body through the **pulse and palpitations, appearance of the tongue and palms**. Then through analysis and summarization, they will determine what nature of syndrome the patient has and how to treat it.

If you’ve ever felt brushed off or rushed by your health care provider, you will be happy to know that this will be a totally different experience. The whole process can take an hour or more; it is essential for a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine to have a complete picture of your health and lifestyle before they begin treating you.

BLOOD AND QI CONNECTION

In traditional Chinese medicine, **Qi** and **blood** have a very close relationship. Qi (pronounced “chee”) can be thought of as the **life-energy** of a person. Qi travels around the body through meridian pathways, and when the Qi is blocked in these channels illness occurs. Since blood and Qi are closely linked to each other, one will follow the other; **where Qi is free flowing, blood will follow suit.** Where Qi is blocked, blood will also stagnate. This is not to say that a blockage in Qi will cause blood clotting, but it will impair proper circulation. Blood is thought of as a **denser** form of Qi in Chinese medicine, although it is generated and moved by the Qi itself.

Another close relationship is that of blood and breastmilk. Chinese medicine believes that the blood of menstruation is breast milk that has been pushed down to the uterus by the force of the heart. The reasoning behind this theory states that the tenderness in the breasts before a period decreases when menstruation begins due to the breast milk being forced down and turned into blood. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding do not menstruate as the milk is stored in the breasts; but if there is more milk than necessary, there can be occasional bleeding.

This is why a **healthy blood flow** for female fertility patients is important. As said by Chinese author Chen Ziming in 1237AD in his book of gynaecology and obstetrics – *“In men, regulate their qi; in women, regulate their blood”*.

THE FERTILITY DIET

A proper diet is **essential** to the regulation of good health – if you are eating food that is high in sugars and saturated fat but low in nutrition, your body can't source the nutrients it needs to properly function. But it's not just **WHAT** you eat that's important; what a lot of people don't understand is the importance of **HOW** you eat and the effects it can have on the **entire body**.

In traditional Chinese medicine, cold food is thought to be an irritant to your stomach. The theory is that your body will work to bring the temperature of whatever you're eating to that of your body temperature. When you eat salad your digestive system uses extra energy to heat that salad to make it easier to pass. Eating food that is easier to pass doesn't necessarily mean quicker or more fluid. A healthy bowel motion should be sausage shaped and robust with no cracks and no liquids. This shows that your body has absorbed all the nutrients properly from your food and it has passed through your digestive system without falter.

Our body as we understand it is more ALKALINE than ACIDIC. This does not refer to what you can taste; a lemon is very sour tasting and acidic but as it is digested it becomes alkaline. Whatever food you eat, after passing through

your digestive system will become acidic or alkaline. The human body needs food that will digest into alkaline substances.

There are also certain foods you can eat to promote fertility in different stages of your ovulation and menstrual cycle, such as whole grains, vitamin C and iron rich foods. We often recommend our fertility patients to read “The Fertility Diet” by Sarah Dobbyn.

The importance of what kind of foods you eat, temperature, chewing and portion control is obvious when you think about what your body gets out of it. Eating food isn't just for going in and out, it gives you ENERGY and NUTRIENTS that pass through your **entire body**! Your body is an intricate and interconnected system; you need to provide your body with the **nutrition and care** that it needs to heal and recover after the stresses of daily life and to promote fertility.

THE RESEARCH

In a recent review from the University of Western Sydney, *Acupuncture and women's health: an overview of the role of acupuncture and its clinical management in women's reproductive health*, researchers Suzanne Cochrane, Caroline A Smith, Alpha Possamai-Inesedy, and Alan Bensoussan studied 318 documents from electronic databases, textbooks and journals “focusing on both clinical findings and experimental research on acupuncture’s mechanisms of action in relation to women’s health.”

Through their extensive investigation they found that when paired with IVF treatment “clinical research has demonstrated that **acupuncture regulates uterine and ovarian blood flow (OBF)**... Since this encourages a thicker uterine wall, fertility is improved through embryo implantation being more successful.”

But Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) is not appealing or affordable for everyone. Other studies they researched covered the use of acupuncture to manipulate the body’s hormones, they state that it “...has been hypothesized that, because acupuncture impacts β -endorphin levels and thus hypothalamic function, which affect gonadotropin-releasing hormone secretion and the

menstrual cycle, **in turn, it is logical to hypothesize that acupuncture may positively influence ovulation and fertility**”

Another factor that is damaging to fertility is stress. Couples being treated for fertility are generally already very stressed about their situation, which “is known to have a **negative effect on reproduction** and perhaps the menstrual cycle. As acupuncture, for example, aids in lowering stress hormones, which undermine fertility, it is thought that this may be a major mechanism for **acupuncture to influence reproductive function and account for fertility-boosting effects.**” As well as an acupuncturists ability to lower stress hormones in the body, many clinics are calm and relaxing environments. In our clinic we do our best to make sure you are as comfortable and relaxed as possible, it’s not uncommon to hear soft snores from behind closed doors! Cochrane goes on to say in her thesis, *Prior to Conception: the role of an acupuncture protocol in enhancing women’s reproductive functioning*, that draws from the previous study’s research, that the “biomedical response to female fertility problems is generally agreed to be **invasive, stressful and expensive...**” and that the “stressful nature of ART may **aggravate the outcome** or at least **impair personal wellbeing** at a time when a couple is trying to conceive and then **build a family environment for a new baby.**”

Acupuncture is also used to effectively treat many other issues that surround fertility such as endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome and other menstrual problems. The data studied in the *Acupuncture and women's health* review showed that "Accumulated clinical experience indicates that **acupuncture regulates the menstrual cycle**. TCM gynaecological textbooks all provide treatment approaches for a range of menstrual irregularities – whether the cycle is too short, too long, or too variable, the bleeding is too scant or too heavy, and menses are accompanied by a range of other symptoms such as abdominal pain, headache, acne, or mood changes." Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine know the "**importance of menstrual regulation** both in the resolution of menstrual disorders and the **promotion of fertility**."

Unfortunately, not all cases were a success, but for the few who did not fall pregnant after acupuncture treatment "results clearly indicate that this acupuncture intervention facilitated a move for many of these women from a puzzled desperate hopelessness to a more **nuanced understanding of themselves and their situated fertility problems**." It is important to keep in mind that these studies were performed under a certain time frame, had the patients had continued with their treatment they may have achieved the results they were hoping for.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are some small risks to acupuncture; after a session you may experience slight bruising, dizziness, fatigue, sometimes the hand and feet points can be sore after needles are removed, or you may get some muscle twitching.

We do our best to make our clinic a safe and comfortable environment for all patients, if you experience any of these symptoms after treatment we will take care of you and provide you with everything you need until the feelings pass.

We also recommend having someone to drive you home after your treatment, especially if you are new to acupuncture and you experience dizziness.

The benefits of treatment certainly outweigh the disadvantages; even in the rare event that you do not respond to treatment or are unable to keep up with regular acupuncture, you will still come away from the experience with a better understanding of your body, how it works and what you can do to improve your condition.

10 TOP TIPS

Here are 10 quick tips to get you started on your journey to a healthy pregnancy!

- 1. DRINK WATER:** 8+ cups every day.
- 2. EXERCISE:** Light walking is ideal, just don't do too much.
- 3. EAT WELL:** Nourish your body with whole foods.
- 4. CUT OUT THE CHEMICALS:** Food treated with pesticides can lower sperm count.
- 5. TRACK YOUR OVULATION:** Write it down and find the pattern.
- 6. DON'T DRINK:** Alcohol is a poison!
- 7. WATCH YOUR WEIGHT:** Being overweight causes extra strain on your body.
- 8. STOP STRESSING:** Try to take care of yourself and relax.
- 9. DON'T DOUCHE:** Natural bacteria live down there for a reason.
- 10. HIT THE BEDROOM:** Don't forget it takes two to tango!

IF YOU LIKED THIS EBOOK...

Look out for our next one on traditional Chinese medicine for general health, or take a look at some of the articles on our blog:

<https://balancetcm.co.nz/blog/>

If you have any suggestions or have a topic you would like to see covered send us an email at: info@balancetcm.co.nz

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Suzanne Cochrane, Caroline A. Smith, Alphia Possamai-Inesedy, and Alan Bensoussan, "Prior to Conception: The Role of an Acupuncture Protocol in Improving Women's Reproductive Functioning Assessed by a Pilot Pragmatic Randomised Controlled Trial," *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 2016, Article ID 3587569, 11 pages, 2016. doi:10.1155/2016/3587569