

Enhancing Fertility with Chinese Medicine

Fertility is a personal and prevalent topic in our modern age. As more and more women choose to delay childbearing until later in life, many face difficulties with fertility and pregnancy. Eventually women may become increasingly anxious to have children before they reach the end of their childbearing years. Many women are turning to reproductive technologies to fix their problems and help them get pregnant quickly.

An increasing number of women are choosing a different approach — preparation. Preparing an aging body to be pregnant, increases the chances that pregnancy will happen naturally. One way to try this strategy is through Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). A practitioner of TCM looks at the individual person, as well as the signs and symptoms they present.

Through various traditional diagnostic tools, a TCM practitioner can determine a patient's strengths, weaknesses and irregularities that may affect fertility. A TCM practitioner can then provide treatment using acupuncture and/or herbal formulations. They will also counsel the patient on how they can alter the way their body functions to achieve better health, with an emphasis on the reproductive system health. Better health brings a greater ability for the body to function properly and overcome fertility issues.

Often when female patients seek out TCM in regards to infertility, they are tired and stressed. They have problems with their menstrual cycles, but assume that everyone's reproductive system works a little differently and theirs is normal for them. Through acupuncture and herbal treatment, the menstrual cycle can be shifted to function better. Patients find that once their menstrual cycle is more regulated they feel better, have more energy and handle stress better, often with fewer emotional swings and a more positive outlook on life. Many patients report that they never realized how much the menstrual cycle affected their overall well being. These outward signs reflect improved functioning of the intricate process of the reproductive system.

In some cases, the results of TCM treatment can be dramatic. Recently an Orlando Florida TV personality spent five years and sold her house to pay for infertility treatments. With the help of a TCM practitioner and two acupuncture treatments, she was able to get pregnant naturally and now has a healthy baby girl (Acupuncture Today, April 2005). This type of quick result is not typical, but it does serve to remind us that helping the body rather than forcing it, can have tremendous benefit. The goal is to become

healthy. Pregnancy is a bonus that can result from better health.

While TCM practitioners have been treating infertility in this way for many generations, biomedical science is just starting to pay attention. In 2002, the medical journal Fertility and Sterility published research results that caught many by surprise. The study showed that the application of standardized acupuncture treatments significantly improved the chances of pregnancy for women who were undergoing invitro fertilization.

In 2005, the same journal published a study that showed sperm structure, quality and motility could be improved using acupuncture. The studies were limited, and did not use the individualized treatment protocols of TCM practitioners. These studies did however demonstrate that acupuncture is an effective tool and brought attention to the fact that acupuncture can be very effective in helping people overcome infertility.

Patients who want to pursue TCM as an alternative or in conjunction with reproductive technologies should do their homework first. This is a complicated form of medicine, requiring specialized training. There are many doctors and other medical practitioners who claim to be acupuncturists. They are allowed by law to do acupuncture, but often do not have the training or national board certification (check www.NCCAOM.ORG for certified practitioners).

Even if a practitioner has certification, it is a good idea to ask about their experience and training in treating infertility. Ancient TCM concepts can be inadequate when dealing with the stressful conditions of modern medical interventions that many women currently endure. Specialized training in this area is only recently becoming more available. (for certified practitioners check ABORM.org) It is also important to work with your primary care physician or obstetrician/ gynecologist, as well as the TCM practitioner. TCM is limited in its ability to diagnose and treat physical and structural abnormalities that may be the cause of infertility. These can be best assessed by modern diagnostic testing.

When it comes to infertility, there is no "one size fits all" answer. Each patient must determine how they want to approach the issue. Fortunately there are now many options available to couples who want to start a family. No medical system or medical practitioner has a guarantee in regards to fertility. Ultimately the best answer is the one that the patient feels most comfortable with.



Bock Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine

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David Bock C.Ac., Dipl.OM., FABORM

Wisconsin Certified Acupuncturist,
National Board Certified (NCCAOM) in
Oriental Medicine, Acupuncture,
Herbal Medicine and Asian Body Work.

Fellow American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine

888 Thackeray Trail #206
Oconomowoc WI 53066
(262) 567-1309
www.davidbocktcm.com