



## Acupuncture

### How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture relies on a diagnosis made using inspection, palpation, questioning and client history. This is similar to western medicine, however 3,000 years ago there were no sophisticated diagnostic tools such as blood tests, x rays, CT scans or even blood pressure kits. Instead pulse taking, inspection of the body including the tongue, and palpation of diagnostically significant areas were used to diagnose pathologies.

Acupuncture diagnosis is based on an understanding of the way the body works as a whole. There are systems such as the respiratory and digestive systems and while they are similar to the systems as we understand them today, they do not completely correlate to modern physiology. For example the kidney system in acupuncture includes the kidneys and urinary bladder, but also includes some endocrine functions such as growth and development and neurological function - spinal cord and cognitive function such as memory.

There are also channels or meridians which are thought to follow specific paths in the body taking nutrients and blood to various organs. These channels include blood and lymph vessels, nerve pathways, muscles and organs, however are not limited to these structures. For example the stomach channel begins deep inside the body in the small intestine and follows a path up through the middle of the body that includes the stomach, the neck, and the face. It opens to the surface of the body below the eye, moving down the cheeks and jaw to the chest, and follows a path down the outside of the leg to the 2<sup>nd</sup> toe. There are meridian lines on both sides of the body and up and down the midline. The acupuncture points are located along these channels and are used to affect the local area, areas along the path of the meridian and the relevant organs.

Small sterile acupuncture needles are inserted at various points once a diagnosis and treatment plan has been formulated. The needles are left in place for approximately 15-20 mins. Most times treatment will be on both the back and the front of the body. Acupuncture optimizes the body's own ability to heal itself. In acupuncture terms we balance the 'qi' and the 'blood'. 'Qi' is the body's own generated energy and includes electrical (nerve impulses, brain waves for example) and chemical energy (cellular transport mechanisms, ionic flow etc.). 'Blood' is the physical body parts - everything you can see- even microscopically, all physical body is 'blood'.



## **Does it hurt?**

Mostly acupuncture is painless. Sometimes you may feel a needle being inserted, most people, including children tolerate this sensation well. If you do feel pain, tell your acupuncturist immediately, as they can remove and reinsert the needle so it is more comfortable. There is no benefit in feeling pain during an acupuncture treatment.

There are sensations that you may feel, such as tingling, a dull achy sensation, relaxation, and heaviness in a limb or the whole body. This is because acupuncture stimulates the body's own electricity and sometimes we can feel this. Generally all acupuncture treatments produce a feeling of relaxation and wellbeing.

## **How many sessions will I need?**

This depends on a number of factors. Because acupuncture helps your body heal itself, how serious and chronic the condition is influences the number of treatments. For internal disorders involving digestive, reproductive or respiratory systems for example, you may get improvement of symptoms yet your acupuncturist will want you to have some follow up treatment. This is because the aim of acupuncture is to treat the cause not just the symptoms, this can take longer, however the body will no longer produce the symptoms and the condition will be resolved.

## **Are there any side effects to acupuncture?**

There is a slight chance of bruising where a needle may be inserted, or if cups are used. Remember to tell your therapist if anything is painful, as there is no benefit to being in pain during a treatment.

After the treatment you may feel sleepy or just very relaxed. If treatment has targeted metabolism you may find your bowel and bladder work better than before. Generally all effects of acupuncture are positive. If you have any queries about your treatment, please call the clinic.





## Understanding a woman's body the acupuncture way

Acupuncture philosophy considers the body to contain the 4 treasures. These are Qi and Blood, Shen and Jing. 'Qi' is the body's own generated energy and includes electrical (nerve impulses, brain waves for example) and chemical energy (cellular transport mechanisms, ionic flow etc.). Low energy, lethargy, fluid retention, diarrhea or sluggish bowel, period pain and headaches are some examples of Qi deficient conditions.

Blood in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the physical body parts - everything you can see - even microscopically, all physical body is Blood. Quality of Blood is reflected in a woman's menstrual cycle. Early periods, scanty or heavy periods, endometriosis, menstrual migraines and low blood pressure are examples of Blood disorders.

Shen is the spirit or animating life force. Shen can be affected by frequent heavy periods with excessive blood loss and menopause can also reflect Shen disorders. Examples of this would be anxiety and insomnia.

Jing can be thought of as our gene pool, the precious substance that maintains our body, dictates our constitution and provides the resources for regeneration and repair. Jing disorders tend to be inherited, affect the reproductive system and body's ability to live up to full potential in health and well being. Life style factors, pollutants and toxins, as well as the age and health of parents at the time of conceiving and bearing children affect Jing. This is a concern for future the overall health, and particularly the reproductive health of future generations.

TCM recognizes natural cycles of growth, in women these are 7 year cycles, for example puberty is expected around 14, maturity from 28-35 and menopause around 49. These cycles reflect the innate timing of the endocrine system and the ongoing balance between the 4 treasures.

Qi is involved in harmonizing body functions such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. If we are deficient in qi we may have irregular or painful periods, infertility or menopausal symptoms. The quality and abundance of Blood reflects in our periods, if we are deficient in Blood we have scanty periods or infertility, for example and if Qi or Blood is stuck, we can have



painful periods, period related migraines or endometriosis. If Jing is deficient we may be infertile or have miscarriages.

## **Acupuncture and fertility**

Acupuncture can be helpful in cases of functional infertility and some cases of age related infertility. Treatment is aimed at regulating the Qi and Blood, and thereby improving or maximizing Jing. In acupuncture terms, we say we can improve and move blood, and increase and move Qi. This means acupuncture can have a regulating effect on the endocrine and nervous systems. Although we do not diagnose according to medical paradigms there are treatment protocols that treat many aspects of fertility.

## **What can acupuncture treat?**

Acupuncture can regulate the menstrual cycle, improve the blood flow, and reduce pain. One of the aims in treating infertility is to make the monthly cycle regular with appropriate flow and no pain. Acupuncture can also help the production of fertile mucous, normalize discharges, resolve pmt symptoms such as mood swings, weight gain or sore breasts. There is some history of treating more structural problems such as endometriosis or blocked tubes that may contribute to infertility. Break through or heavy bleeding can also be treated. Tiredness and low libido is common during the reproductive years and this can be addressed with acupuncture and herbs.

Acupuncture is safe during pregnancy and can be used to maintain a pregnancy where there has been a history of miscarriage. Acupuncture is also effective for treating morning sickness, or as in the case of some women, all day sickness.

Menopausal dysfunctions such as tiredness, insomnia, hot flushes, anxiety, dry vagina and low libido can be addressed too. It is thought that with care and attention a woman may move through her reproductive life from one phase to another enjoying optimal health the whole time.





Recent studies show that acupuncture is compatible with and can help with Assisted Reproductive Techniques (ART). Acupuncture treatment can be used for preparation for both pregnancy and IVF. In the case of IVF a study discussed below shows successful outcomes are increased by more than 20% when women were given acupuncture before and after insertion of the blastocyst. This treatment consisted of a fairly basic approach using acupuncture points that targeted the uterus, aiming to optimize implantation and improve tone and blood flow to the uterus.

Most acupuncturists would prefer some preparation before the procedure to optimize efficacy and comfort. The emphasis in acupuncture treatment is placed on harmonizing the Qi and Blood and improving general health. It is better to go into therapy with optimal health and minimal stress. A recommended time frame is 3 months before IVF/ART is begun. Sometimes after 3 months of treatment a woman is able to fall pregnant naturally.

### **Recent research on acupuncture and IVF**

In an article published by W. Paulus, M. Zhang, I. El-Danasouri, E. Strehler and K. Sterzik titled, "Influence of Acupuncture on the Pregnancy Rate in Patients Who Undergo Assisted Reproduction Therapy", appearing in the April 2000 issue of Fertility and Sterility, German researchers announced that they had increased the success rate by nearly 50% in women undergoing in vitro fertilization. The researchers led by Dr. Wolfgang E. Paulus and colleagues at the Chrisitan-Lauritzen-Institute in Ulm, Germany, said they do not know why acupuncture works and plan more studies.

"Acupuncture seems to be a useful tool for improving pregnancy rate after assisted reproductive techniques," they wrote. "The analysis shows that the pregnancy rate for the acupuncture group is considerably higher than that for the control group (42.5% versus 26.3%)," they wrote.

Working with a team at the Department of Chinese Medicine at Tongji Hospital in Wuhan, China, Paulus and colleagues tested 160 women undergoing in vitro fertilization. Half received standard in vitro fertilization, while half were given acupuncture treatments before and after. "We chose acupuncture points that can affect the autonomic nervous system-involved in the control of muscles



and glands-and thus, theoretically, should make the lining of the uterus more receptive to receiving an embryo.

According to the report, about 26% of women who did not receive acupuncture became pregnant, compared with nearly 43% of women who underwent the traditional Chinese therapy 25 minutes before and again 25 minutes after the embryo transfer. There were no differences in age, number of transferred embryos, or the number of previous cycles between the two groups of patients. In this study, women received acupuncture along the spleen and stomach channels in an attempt to relax the uterus and improve the flow of energy to this region. They also received acupuncture needles in their ears to stabilize the endocrine system.

"The results demonstrate that acupuncture therapy improves pregnancy rate," concluded Dr. Paulus and colleagues. "However, more research is needed to determine whether the higher pregnancy rate among women receiving acupuncture was due to an actual physiological or psychological effects," they added.

Acupuncture can be helpful in cases of hyperstimulation of the ovaries, as treatment can reduce the severity of the symptoms without interfering with the ART process. Acupuncture is also very calming and can help relax a woman before fertilization and also during the waiting period, which can be stressful. Acupuncture is safe to use during pregnancy and has a long history of positive intervention in the case of pregnancy related disorders. Once the embryo has been implanted into the uterus, it is very important to prevent miscarriage, especially in older women as the rate of miscarriage with IVF can be up to 50% in women of 40. Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine can reduce the rate of miscarriage and support the pregnancy to full term.

Acupuncture and herbal medicine can also help improve male fertility, enhance sperm production, quality and mobility where this is a problem. In general acupuncture is a painless, relaxing modality, which can be comforting to some men who might be concerned that the procedure would be uncomfortable or stressful.





## Acupuncture and moxibustion for turning breech babies

Acupuncture is safe and effective in a number of pregnancy related conditions. Acupuncture can be used for general well being during pregnancy as well as specific conditions such as morning sickness, tiredness, back pain, carpal tunnel, constipation and the like. Acupuncture can also be used to reduce the symptoms of concurrent conditions such as colds/ 'flu, sinus or digestive disorders that are not related to pregnancy. Acupuncture theory considers the overall state of health of the woman, rather than just the gynecological history. Treatment generally provides more energy and well being during pregnancy.

## Moxibustion for turning breech babies

Moxibustion is the burning of the herb mugwort over acupuncture points to promote a therapeutic effect. The herb is generally rolled into cylinders (like a cigar) lit and held an inch or so away from the skin. Heat is aimed at the acupuncture point. There is some smoke which has a characteristic herbal smell. It is best not to directly inhale the smoke, and it may be irritating if it gets in the eyes.



A randomized controlled open clinical trial of moxibustion treatment to acupoint BL 67 to promote the version of breech babies to vertex was undertaken in Women's Hospital in Jiangxi Province and Jiujiang Women's and children's Hospital in the People's Republic of China. Two hundred and sixty primigravidas with breech presentations at 32 weeks



were randomized to the moxibustion group or to be given no treatment. By the end of two weeks of either daily treatment or twice daily treatment for 15 minutes on each side, 72.4 percent of the women in the daily treatment group and 81.4 percent in the twice a day treatment group had vertex babies. There were 47.7 percent vertex presentations in the control group. -JAMA Nov. 11, 1998

## How to use the moxa

Light the sticks (they burn with no flame but an intense heat and pungent smell) and position the hot tip as close as possible to the outside of each little toe, with the heat directed at the point just above the toe nail. Leave in place for 20 minutes. Be careful not to touch the skin as you will burn yourself. The heat should be as strong as you can tolerate, for the best effect. Two sticks will be needed - they can be used several times. Sit on a chair and place each foot on a book with your little toes hanging over the edge. Place each stick on another book with the tip in the gap.

After a few minutes, you will notice the baby begin to kick and move. The primary aim of the moxibustion treatment is to encourage the baby to move around and thus increase the effect of gravity which will help the heaviest part of the baby (its head) to turn over and enter into the pelvis.

This simple treatment is best done just before bed, starting at 34 - 36 weeks. It takes several hours for the baby to turn, and this will be easier if you are lying down, because the baby will not be sitting as firmly into the pelvis. Continue over several nights, or until the baby has turned itself. Remember to follow the directions given to you by your acupuncturist and if you have any questions call the clinic.





## Preparation for pregnancy

- Getting ready for pregnancy - how does traditional Chinese medicine help
- Qi and blood
- Regulate menses optimize fertility
- Diet and nutrition
- Harmony in body symptoms

