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## **Optimal Fertility With Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine**

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Chinese medicine has a long tradition of successfully treating infertility. Today many women choose to take advantage of an integrated approach combining both Chinese and western medicine to enhance their fertility, thus making use of the best that both systems have to offer. Western medicine has made great advances in diagnostic tools and assisted reproductive techniques, including IVF (in vitro fertilization). The Chinese medical practitioner takes a holistic approach to assessing the health of the reproductive system within the overall health of the individual, then formulates a treatment plan to support wellness and promote optimal fertility.

For optimal fertility, a woman must have strong ovarian function, and a healthy uterine environment. Since menstruation is the most easily observed indication of ovarian function and uterine environment, a healthy period is a key component of optimal fertility. A woman's cycles should be regular in length, with very little PMS. During the menses, there should be a moderate amount of fresh red blood, and only mild cramping, if any at all. In Chinese medicine, it is said that "in order to cure female infertility, the first important thing is to adjust the menstruation". This means correcting any menstrual abnormalities, such as early or late menstruation, painful periods, too much or too little flow, endometriosis, and PMS. Since Chinese medicine treats all of these conditions quite effectively, it likewise can treat female infertility with a great deal of success.

### **What causes infertility?**

One of the leading causes of infertility in women is poor circulation of blood and qi (pronounced "chee") in the lower abdomen, including the reproductive system. Both Chinese and western medicine recognize the need for good blood flow to promote fertility. Blood supplies the reproductive system with oxygen and other important nutrients. Qi, or vital energy, can be thought of as supplying the life force to the ovaries and womb. The lower abdomen should have plenty of qi and blood flowing easily through it. In Chinese medicine, a slow down of qi and blood circulation is called stagnation. Stagnation leads to a poor uterine environment, thus decreasing fertility. Symptoms of poor circulation of blood and energy in the lower abdomen may include painful menstrual periods, heavy bleeding, dark colored blood with clots and endometriosis. Circulation may be impaired by a lack of physical activity, or by cold, particularly from cold food and beverages. Both acupuncture and herbs play an important role in improving circulation and energizing the reproductive system.

For many women, one of the major contributing factors to poor fertility is low reproductive energy. Symptoms of low reproductive energy include fatigue, poor ovarian function, long irregular periods, and light menstrual flow. From an evolutionary standpoint (think back to a time when we were hunters and gatherers) reproduction is an energetic luxury, and it occurs when the body has enough resources, such as food and shelter, to reproduce successfully. Today, the causes of low reproductive energy may be more subtle, resulting from exhaustion due to many years of overwork, inadequate rest, stress and irregular diet. When a woman is exhausted, her system may determine that it is an inopportune time for her to get pregnant. Deeply recharging one's batteries is an important aspect of optimizing one's fertility. Chinese medicine makes use of acupuncture and herbs to help rejuvenate one's energy.

### **General recommendations:**

In order to promote one's reproductive energy, it is important to get adequate rest and relaxation, and to not overwork or over schedule oneself to the point of exhaustion. Reducing stress can play a significant role in enhancing optimal fertility. It is helpful to incorporate both "down time" and fun into one's schedule.

Regular physical activity enhances the circulation of energy and blood, thereby reducing stagnation and promoting a healthy uterine environment. Moderate exercise can also promote hormonal balance and strong ovarian function. It has the added benefits of boosting energy and reducing stress. Regular exercise is an integral part of the Chinese medical prescription for removing stagnation, thereby promoting overall health and most importantly, a healthy reproductive system.

Eating well supports fertility by increasing one's energy through proper nourishment, and by limiting the negative impact of certain foods. Every bite of food we eat presents an opportunity to benefit our health or challenge it. Both the food itself and the nature of the dining experience serve to nourish our systems. It is best to enjoy regular meals eaten in a relaxed ambience. It is important to consume warm foods and beverages, as cold foods and iced beverages can easily lead to stagnation in the lower abdomen and negatively impact the uterine environment. One should also emphasize organic foods that are free of chemicals. Doing so not only limits the amount of toxins that enter the system, but also helps limit our intake of hormonal mimics. substances that act like various hormones such as estrogen, once they enter the body. These hormonal mimics can create imbalances in the endocrine system that may contribute to infertility. Making healthy choices in our diet is a cornerstone to optimizing one's health and fertility.

Chinese herbs are a form of supercharged nutrition, and can help rebuild one's reproductive energy and support ovarian function. They enhance circulation through the lower abdomen, clear out stagnation, and help improve the uterine environment. Chinese herbal prescriptions are tailored to the individual needs of the

patient. Ten to fifteen herbs are combined taking into account the patient's symptoms, basic constitution, and any factors influencing the patient's health on the day of the prescription. Also considered is the chemical synergy of the various herbs, a tradition which has been studied for over 3000 years.

Acupuncture is very effective at enhancing the circulation of energy and blood throughout the body, and especially in the lower abdomen and the reproductive system. Acupuncture supports a healthy uterine environment, and has been shown to help increase the success rates of the IVF. Acupuncture also boosts reproductive energy, and can promote strong ovarian function. It can also relieve pain, regulate hormones, reduce stress and increase energy. The insertion of the acupuncture needles conducts the blood and energy past areas of blockage, restoring circulation and thereby restoring health. The needles are tiny and cause little, if any, pain upon insertion. Occasionally, patients report feeling mild tingling or electrical sensations. Most patients leave the treatment feeling profoundly relaxed and refreshed.

Chinese medicine considers the whole individual when evaluating the health of the reproductive system. A woman's lifestyle, stress levels, diet, exercise, and overall energy (or lack thereof) all contribute to wellness and optimal fertility. The recent advances in fertility treatments in western medicine have provided significant gains in what is possible in fertility treatments, while Chinese medicine continues its long tradition of successfully treating infertility. Together, these two systems offer an effective combination for treating the many different aspects of infertility.