



FERTILITY  
ASSOCIATES  
of MEMPHIS

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*Beginning July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Fertility Associates of Memphis is offering a free consultation with Dr. Mark Xu, a licensed and board-certified acupuncturist and specialist in Traditional Chinese Medicine for all patients undergoing in vitro fertilization (IVF). Recent peer-reviewed studies point to a positive effect for Traditional Chinese Medicine on women undergoing infertility treatment. We believe it offers an important alternative benefit to our patients during their IVF procedure.*

## **USE OF ACUPUNCTURE AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE DURING ASSISTED REPRODUCTION**

If headlines are any indication, it's easy to believe that treatment for infertility and pregnancy loss is strictly a modern day science, made possible solely through the courtesy of high-tech medicine. While modern science has made huge advances in the treatment of infertility, many couples trying to get pregnant may be curious about an age-old treatment -- one so steeped in tradition it's about as far from life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as one can get. Today, even high-tech reproductive endocrinologists are looking to the somewhat mysterious world of Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture to help fertility patients for whom western science alone is not quite enough.

### **How does acupuncture work?**

In ancient Chinese literature, the theory and technique of acupuncture was first described over 3,000 years ago. Since then, the popularity of this medical treatment has spread beyond China to the western world. Acupuncture is a treatment that relies on the painless but strategic placement of tiny needles into a "grid-like" pattern that spans the body, from head to toe. The needles are used to stimulate certain key "energy points" believed to regulate spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical balance. During its' long history, a system of body meridians have been documented and researched which form the basic theory underlying acupuncture therapy. Meridians and collaterals form a network, which transport blood and a life energy known as Qi (pronounced chee) that ancient wisdom says must flow through the body unhampered from head to toe. When it doesn't, illness or malfunctions such as infertility arise. After making a diagnosis, experienced practitioners place the needles at key meridians linked to the reproductive organs, moving the flow of Qi from areas where it may be too abundant, to areas that are deficient, all in a direction that encourages fertility.

Physicians in the West have a difficult time understanding these explanations because they do not conform to any basis of Western physiology or biology. But studies have shown some insight into how acupuncture might impact conventional body function. It appears to modify the secretion of neuro-transmitters - chemical that are released by nerves and is important in the regulation of the menstrual cycle. Secondly, acupuncture may facilitate blood flow to the uterus through an effect on sympathetic nerve activity. Lastly, acupuncture stimulates the production of endogenous opioids in the brain, a natural 'narcotic' which reduces the biologic stress response.

## **Can acupuncture improve the success rate of in vitro fertilization (IVF)?**

Acupuncture may be a useful adjunct to be used along with assisted reproductive techniques such as IVF. Indeed, in a study of 160 women, published April 2002 in the reproductive journal *Fertility and Sterility*, a group of German researchers found that adding acupuncture to the traditional IVF treatment protocols substantially increased pregnancy success over those women who did not use acupuncture. In still another research paper published in the journal *Medical Acupuncture* in 2000, Sandra Emmons, MD, Assistant Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Oregon Health Sciences University, reports that acupuncture may directly impact the number of egg follicles available for fertilization in women undergoing IVF. To date, there have been at least nine other experimental trials that have studied the use of acupuncture primarily around the time of embryo transfer. Most have documented a benefit with acupuncture treatment and none have indicated a detrimental effect.

## **Is acupuncture of benefit even without IVF?**

There is evidence in the Western medical literature demonstrating acupuncture's benefit by itself in the treatment of reproductive disease, especially with recurrent pregnancy loss and menstrual abnormalities such as polycystic ovarian syndrome. What must be understood is that acupuncture is rarely used in isolation with Traditional Chinese Medicine. Practitioners usually combine it with a prescription of Chinese herbs to fully restore the body's balance. While this may cause some concern in Western patients - especially pregnant ones - there is a wide body of Eastern literature to support its' use. Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration does not read the Eastern medical literature and likely will not sanction the use of Chinese herbs anytime soon. Until then, patients will need to rely on their own judgment as well as the advice of their Chinese Medicine specialist.

## **How should I proceed?**

Fertility Associates of Memphis believes that the benefit of acupuncture outweigh any small risk for patients undergoing IVF. Included with our management fee for IVF, we offer a single consultation with Dr. Mark Xu, a licensed and board-certified acupuncturist and specialist in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Dr Xu will offer a treatment plan that will integrate our IVF protocol with his acupuncture treatment. This will incorporate a specific timing of acupuncture treatment as tested in published studies. There is no obligation to proceed with acupuncture and it will not affect your IVF schedule.

If you are not an IVF patient but you would still like to explore Traditional Chinese Medicine, we encourage you to make an appointment with Dr Xu for a consultation. More information can be found at [www.XuWellnessCenter.com](http://www.XuWellnessCenter.com).

*Fertility Associates of Memphis is dedicated, through state-of-the-art care, to providing the most advanced medical and surgical care to patients suffering from complex problems with infertility, recurrent pregnancy loss, gynecologic endocrine disorders, abnormal menstrual function, reproductive tract anomalies, and menopause. We offer a comprehensive and highly successful program for the care of the infertile couple. Our physicians are board-certified in reproductive endocrinology and infertility, the only Mid-South physicians who have achieved this qualification. For more information, please visit [www.fertilitymemphis.com](http://www.fertilitymemphis.com) or phone 901-747-2229 to make an appointment.*