

Chinese Medicine Perspectives on Infertility

by Leslie McGee RN, L.Ac.

Chinese medicine offers much to women struggling with infertility. A long anecdotal record among Chinese medicine practitioners is now being supported by research. Acupuncture has been evaluated as an adjunct therapy during the in-vitro fertilization (IVF) process, and a recent meta-analysis of several studies (British Medical Journal Mar 2008; 336: 545 - 549) concludes that acupuncture appears to improve pregnancy rates.

The Chinese approach to enhancing fertility is to normalize the menstrual cycle, and ensure the abundance of qi, blood and essence. We also pay attention to harmonizing and balancing yin and yang. Our attention to the yin demonstrates the special insight of Chinese medicine. Modern fertility treatment focuses on the yang process of forcing more eggs out of the ovaries at the clear expense of the woman's yin. Indeed, most ovarian stimulating drugs are very hot, according to Chinese medicine, and thus they damage the yin. The result is thin uterine lining, absent mid-cycle cervical fluid, and a sub-optimal uterine environment for the embryo. Acupuncture alone can counteract some of these side effects of ovarian stimulation, but Chinese herbs can bring even more benefit. Chinese herbs during ovarian stimulation have been researched in China, but not in the West. (Zhenjiang Journal of Chinese Medicine 2007; 7 : 405)

These days acupuncture alone to support IVF success is fairly common, but as a practitioner I find myself wishing more women tried Chinese medicine first. By the time I see a woman, maybe just a few days away from an IVF embryo transfer, she may have had multiple medicated cycles and be in significant imbalance, probably much more so than before she started the fertility drugs. The exclusive approach of Western medicine seems to be to crank up the ovaries, and ignore the other issues that may truly be the root of the infertility.

The individual patterns associated with infertility in Chinese medicine are varied. Three patterns are quite common and may occur alone or in combination with each other.

<u>Pattern</u>	<u>Symptoms</u>	<u>Possible Western Correlate</u>
Yin deficiency	Scant menses Scant cervical fluid Short follicular phase	Rising FSH levels
Yang deficiency	Hx of miscarriage Heavy menses Cold feet	Sub-clinical hypothyroid Insulin resistance
Blood stasis	painful menses Dark menstrual blood	Endometriosis Coagulopathies Insulin resistance

While this is a very simple summary of the patterns we see, each of these pathologies can be treated with Chinese herbs and acupuncture, and even if the woman elects to proceed with advanced reproductive intervention, her chances of sustaining a full term pregnancy will be greatly enhanced.

Chinese medicine restores balance to the ovaries, uterus, and spirit. Achieving balance is not an over-night event, and not as quick as a round of clomid and the swollen follicles that follow. But Chinese medicine will make you healthier and that is always good for you and your pregnancy.

If you are intrigued by the idea of using Chinese medicine to enhance your fertility I encourage you to explore this topic more fully. I have developed an on-line course that delves into the Chinese theories and highlights several diet and lifestyle remedies that can be very helpful. Part one of my course is free of charge, so that you can take a look at my teaching style. I developed this course because I have so much I want to share with each of my clients who struggle with this painful challenge.

This link takes you to part 1 of my course, “Chinese Medicine Fertility Wisdom”.

I am also available for phone or in-person consultations. Please contact me at ewqi4me@yahoo.com, or 520-318-4964.