

ACUPUNCTURE MADE ME PREGNANT

When faced with the prospect of life without a baby, Sarah Vaughan tried everything to get pregnant, from health plans to fertility drugs. Then she decided to visit an acupuncturist...

“ I crouched in the moonlit bathroom, sobbing as the unmistakable period pains coursed through my body. My desperate longing for a baby had become the biggest thing in my life but, once again, I wasn't pregnant.

The fact that I was taking the powerful fertility drug Clomid made the pains much, much stronger. And, to top it off, there was the bleak awareness that this was my fourth attempt at this drug, out of a maximum of six, and it still wasn't working. If the next two attempts failed, it was on to tougher measures – hormone injections and, ultimately, IVF.

It had been 19 months since my husband, Phil, and I decided to try for a baby. We'd been married for a year, it was the month before my 30th birthday and, after popping the Pill for a decade, the time felt right to stop. So I was heartbroken when, six months later, I still hadn't had a period.

I went for blood tests that suggested my ovaries weren't responding to signals from my brain to start the ovulation process, and an ultrasound showed that I had, in the words of my consultant, 'the ovaries of an anorexic, an athlete, or someone

under severe stress.'

There's nothing worse than realising you may have inadvertently caused your most agonising problem. I worked hard to stay slim and, in the run-up to my wedding, plummeted to eight-and-a-half stone (I'm 5ft 8in). And as a journalist on a national newspaper, my job involves lots of stress.

On my consultant's advice, I went up to a more healthy nine-and-a-half stone. But eliminating stress was more difficult. I didn't want – nor could

count with flying colours, I began my first course of Clomid to kick-start ovulation. I gained five pounds and the drug induced a period – but there was no sign of my producing a viable egg.

Our crushing disappointment was made all the worse by the fact that my friends seemed to be Britain's most fertile women, with another one getting up the duff every fortnight. Even my younger sister announced she was pregnant with a honeymoon baby. Tears streamed down my face

“ PHIL WAS SCEPTICAL BUT I WAS DESPERATE ”

I afford – to give up work, but I cut out caffeine, cut right back on alcohol, and spent a small fortune on reflexology. I also devoured every book and article I could find on fertility, and consulted a herbalist. For a year, Phil, who's a doctor, humoured my pursuit of alternative therapies, but he wanted a child every bit as much as I did. Yet I still hadn't had a period. Wasn't it time now to try conventional medicine?

So, a month before my 31st birthday, after Phil passed the obligatory sperm

as Phil and I held each other, consumed with envy, guilt and self-pity.

The problem with infertility is that it makes you lose all perspective. After that first Clomid failure, we decided to give ourselves a break and took three months off, but by Christmas I was back on the drug for three more attempts that would dominate our lives. During those months, I ballooned by a stone so that I was now two stone heavier than when we'd started, and I hated it. I also got used to scans, >



HEALTH HANDBOOK

sometimes three a week, to track possible development of egg follicles. I felt as if I had permanent PMT and was weepy and irrational. Sex was no longer spontaneous. Forcing your exhausted husband to perform at 6.30am, an hour before a busy 13-hour day, is hardly romantic. As he said at one point: 'This isn't how it's meant to be.'

It was my mum who sent me an article about how acupuncture could help with infertility. It talked about a psychotherapist and acupuncture master called Gerad Kite who claimed to have had some success helping women to conceive. I didn't know if it would work – and Phil was sceptical – but I was desperate. And it was this or IVF. Surely it was worth a try?

After quizzing me on my digestion, which was erratic, Gerad was convinced the reason I wasn't ovulating was because my body wasn't allowing me to nourish a baby. I might be eating the right things, but the nutrients weren't being properly processed by the stomach and spleen. To put this right, he inserted fine, hair-width needles into acupuncture points on my back and feet relating to these organs, before moving on to points relating to my ovaries.

The sensation was incredible; the needle barely hurt but, once the acupuncture point was reached, I felt an intense throbbing. I was convinced something was happening when this intense feeling shot down the side of my body to what felt like my ovaries. I went home feeling immensely positive – elated. It was what I imagined having a 'hit' from a drug felt like.

I'd had three sessions when my niece, Anna, was born. Looking into her eyes, it was almost as if something primeval clicked deep inside me, and

I knew that to feel 'complete' I had to care for something or someone.

The next week, I told Gerad if I couldn't get pregnant, I wanted a kitten and a garden. 'Good – that's because you want to nurture something,' he explained. That same night, Phil surprised me with a 10-week bundle of fluff from the Cats Protection League – a complete coincidence. As I cuddled my kitten, Mackerel, I wept at finally having something to care for.

And two days later, still without having had a period that hadn't been induced by drugs, something miraculous happened: I became pregnant.

It had been three months since I'd last tried to conceive with Clomid, but in the end I achieved it naturally. My reaction, as I stared at the pink lines of the pregnancy test, was bemusement. Phil's knowledge of anatomy temporarily left him: 'How the hell did we manage that?' he asked.

The hospital described it as 'spontaneous conception', an unexplained incident in the tricky world of infertility. But I believe the acupuncture – together, perhaps, with the kitten – was the crucial thing.

Alright, so I admit scientific evidence is thin, because little research has been conducted, but the anecdotal evidence is strong. Gerad sees 15 failed IVF cases a week and claims that most are in the right state to conceive within six sessions. One woman who tried IVF nine times was successful.

As for my doctor husband, he remains sceptical about

'meridian channels' and 'the flow of energy', but even he admits the acupuncture may have made me relaxed enough to get pregnant, while his gift of a kitten (of course) bears ultimate responsibility.

I'll never know for sure, but as I approach the end of a healthy, much-longed-for pregnancy, I'm immensely grateful that I went to see Gerad, a move that proved cheaper and less painful than IVF. I can't quite believe this is happening – but then the baby kicks ferociously. Life is about to change, and I can't wait. □

“ I KNEW THAT TO FEEL COMPLETE I HAD TO CARE FOR SOMETHING, SOMEONE ”



ACUPUNCTURE: could it work for you?

◆ **THE THEORY** Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese practice based on the belief that energy – Qi (pronounced 'chi') – flows through the body along 'meridians', which affect different organs such as the spleen, liver, lungs, stomach and kidneys. Problems occur when distress causes a blockage of this energy.

An acupuncturist seeks to get it flowing again, using needles to stimulate certain points along the meridians.

◆ DOES IT REALLY WORK?

In a study carried out in the US at the Reproductive Medicine and Fertility Centre, 51 per cent of women who had acupuncture as well as IVF became pregnant, compared with 36 per cent of women undergoing conventional treatment only. Only eight per cent of acupuncture patients suffered a miscarriage, compared with 20 per cent of other patients.

◆ WHAT ELSE IS IT GOOD FOR?

Research at the University of Oslo found it was effective for neck and shoulder pain; and studies at the Pain Treatment Unit in Spain showed that acupuncture used with medication was more effective against osteoarthritis than drugs alone. The World Health Organisation recognises more than 100 conditions that can be helped by acupuncture.

British Acupuncture Council
www.acupuncture.org.uk; 020 8735 0400. Gerad Kite www.gkclinics.com; 020 7701 1174.



ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE CHANGED MY LIFE

eve readers who gave up hope reveal their unconventional cures



'In 24 hours, the pain vanished'

'I suffered from stomach pains for five years. I saw a kinesiologist who said it was candida. She manipulated my tummy and told me to stop eating yeast. The next day I was pain-free.'

Diane Brunt, 34, Milton Keynes



'Now I can face the world'

'I used steroid cream for the dermatitis on my face for 20 years but it was still dry, sore and, worse, it often bled. Then I bought some aloe vera gel from a health food store and it's worked.'

Tanya Blakelock, 37, Cambridge



'I got rid of migraines'

'I had so many migraines that my doctor had prescribed me a daily anti-migraine tablet. But before I started to take it, I went to see a chiropractor. Thanks to her, my life has totally changed.'

Samantha Hillier, 32, Exeter



'My GP said there was no cure'

'In 1999 I keeled over with back pain and couldn't move. I was told there was no cure, but the London College of Osteopathy gave me exercises that have kept me supple ever since.'

Clare Tydeman, 34, London