

♀ FERTILITY SPECIAL ♂

Could acupuncture

An increasing number of would-be parents are turning to acupuncture to help boost their fertility – but can it really help some couples start a family? **Sarah Merson** investigates

There's increasing evidence to show that while orthodox medicine may not always be able to assist couples when it comes to fertility, some alternative medicine might. Acupuncture has drawn much media attention recently amid controversy over whether the traditional Chinese practice can be proven to have beneficial effects on our health – in particular whether it can help some couples undergoing IVF treatment to conceive.

Fans of acupuncture argue that not only can it combat the negative impact of modern busy lifestyles, but it also has a direct effect on fertility.

It's based on the principle that Qi, the body's life force, should flow unhampered around the body; but because of the stresses of daily life, illness or infection, this energy can be blocked. Through acupuncture, practitioners aim to target those blockages, releasing the energy and freeing the body to exist in a more harmonious state.

Natural approach

"Acupuncture can be used to strengthen the constitution, thus enabling couples to cope with any stress and anxieties they may experience during the process of



help you conceive?

“It worked for me!”

One person who's certain that acupuncture aids fertility and healthy pregnancy is 37-year old Helen Branch

Director of a TV company in London, Helen married husband James in March 2003 and in January 2004 they decided to start a family. Within no time she found she was pregnant, and all seemed to be well at first. “At just 28 weeks, though, my waters broke and at 30 weeks, I gave birth to my baby boy, Max, by emergency caesarean,” says Helen. “Due to congenital abnormalities, Max hadn't developed properly in the womb and was very sick from the moment he was born. Weighing just 3½lbs, his tiny body was under-developed and within his first two months he had three major operations. It was a traumatic time for my husband and I, but of course you do whatever you have to do for your child. That's why, when Max suffered repeated lung collapse and oedema and finally heart and kidney failure after the third operation, we agreed that the doctors could turn off his life support machine. On 2 October, at two months old, and close to his due date, Max died in

my arms.” Looking back, Helen wonders where she got the strength to cope.

In 2005, she became pregnant again but miscarried. She then went on to have two more miscarriages, and after a series of scans and tests, was still given no medical answers.

By 2006, she was very low and desperate for some expert care. Then, while out on a hen night, various friends told her they knew women who'd become pregnant following acupuncture, and they recommended the Kite Clinic for acupuncture treatment.

Turning point

After making enquiries, Helen was quickly assigned to acupuncturist and fertility specialist Kelly Millington. “My first appointment gave me a real sense of being cared for, and huge relief,” says Helen.

Through applying fine needles into Helen's back, feet and chest, Kelly was able to pinpoint Helen's troubled areas. “We practise classical five-element



acupuncture,” explains Kelly. “The elements [wood, fire, earth, metal and water] correspond to different organs and meridians in the body. For good health, all these elements must be strong and work together. When a person becomes out of balance, one element will become distressed, and may affect the functioning of the others and create emotional and physical symptoms.”

Helen's treatment focused on improving her overall physical and emotional wellbeing by treating her water element – her ‘weak link’ element. “I inserted needles along the kidney and bladder meridians to increase energy flow and clear



any blockages,” says Kelly. “This gave an overall boost to Helen's whole system, increasing her chances of conceiving naturally.”

Helen was treated for seven months, then in May 2007 found she was pregnant. “I realise now there was a lot of work to be done, physically and emotionally, to prepare me for a healthy pregnancy. Having thrown myself into my work after Max died, I hadn't allowed myself to realise just how low I really was.

“During the first trimester, I had acupuncture every week, then every fortnight. Having the treatment helped bring balance. My husband began to comment on how much happier I seemed,” recalls Helen. Having acupuncture all the way up to her due date, Helen gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Emily, on 30 January 2008. “I'm certain acupuncture played a very significant part,” she says.

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