

**Fertility Support Program**

For many people, there is no greater joy than creating and bringing new life into the world and being a parent. In today’s society, creating a family has become challenging due to biological and psycho-emotional factors in addition to the changes we’ve undergone on a cultural and societal level. For females, there are many reasons that it can be difficult to become pregnant. Biological conditions like ovulatory failure/defect, blocked fallopian tubes, endometriosis, fibroids/polyps, PCOS, pelvic adhesions, hormonal imbalances, and age can contribute to infertility. For women with no physiological complications, the cause is usually a combination of factors such as: overwork, strain, stress, poor diet, excessive/lack of exercise, and excessive sexual activity as they can throw the body off balance. Male factors also contribute to cases of infertility, such as low sperm counts, poor sperm motility, obstructions, and some genetic conditions.

**The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Approach**

Using acupuncture can be utilized as a stand-alone treatment, but it also works synergistically with Western Medicine and Assisted Reproductive Technologies like IVF. In fact, more research is coming out showing that acupuncture is an effective supplement when working with a Reproductive Endocrinologist (RE) for both female and male factors. TCM focuses on regulating menstruation while supporting and nourishing the energy of the reproductive system to ensure conception, implantation, and healthy gestation. Specifically, this includes balancing hormones such estrogen, progesterone, LH & FSH, and increasing blood flow in the reproductive organs. Recent studies have been published indicating that one mechanism through which acupuncture works is by increasing production of Th2 cytokines and inhibiting the production of Th1 cytokines, which improves implantation. Acupuncture also aims to work on the mind and emotions, since many cases of infertility without a physiological basis can be rooted in stress.

**Acupuncture Treatment**

During the course of treatment, regular acupuncture is best (ideally once during the follicular stage, once during the leutal phase, and once during the premenstrual phase). In some cases, moxibustion is utilized in conjunction with acupuncture treatments to nourish and warm the uterus. Moxibustion involves the burning of a dry-packed herb called mugwort, similar to how you burn incense. Moxa elicits a soothing sensation of warmth on the skin. It is a completely safe procedure, and there is no pain, burning, or scarring of the skin.

**Herbal Treatment**

In some cases, herbal treatments are used. These formulas work to regulate menstruation, balance hormones, and ensure adequate nourishment of blood and energy into the reproductive system. In some cases, a supplementary formula is also used to treat underlying conditions such as fibroids, PCOS, or emotional issues.

**Nutrition**

**General Guidelines**

* Clean, whole foods
* As much as possible: organic, free range, locally sourced
* Mindful eating: chewing slowly & completely, eating meals slowly, not eating while watching TV etc.,
* Simple idea: listen to your body and get a feel for what makes you feel good

**Foods To Include:**

* Dark Leafy Greens: Spinach and Kale
* Beets or beet juice
* Avocados (1/2 per day regularly)
* Brocollini
* Boiled (Hard or Soft) Eggs
* Goji Berries
* Pistachios, Walnuts, Almond
* Coconut oil as a substitute for oils, butters etc.
* Ginger: raw mixed in with smoothies or as a spice
* “Warm” Meat: lamb is especially good
* 1tbsp of Organic Black Strap Molasses daily (dissolved in hot water)

**Foods to Avoid**

* Alcohol, tobacco etc.
* Excessive sugar, caffeine, & processed foods
* Cold Cuts
* Soft cheeses (goat, brie etc)
* Raw and “Cold” foods
* Dairy (almond milk, coconut milk, rice milk ok)

**Warm vs Cold Food**

In TCM, food is believed to hold energetic properties that pertain to degrees of cold and heat. During pregnancy, its important to have a larger amount of warmer foods and a lower amount of colder food to encourage a warm womb and healthy gestation. You do not need to cut out cold foods all together, just eat them in moderation and make sure you’re eating more “warm” foods.

**Warm Foods**: onion, leeks, asparagus, pomegranate, apricot, peach, cherry, raspberry, pumpkin, dates, most meats, ginger, legumes, nuts, seeds

**Neutral Foods:** sweet potato, root vegetables (carrot, turnip etc), plums, figs, mushrooms, seafood, eggs

**Cold Foods:** melon, cucumber, celery, tomato, banana, pears, greens, eggplant, citrus, mango, papaya, pineapple, apple,

**Exercise During Pregnancy**

* The general rule is to match the level of activity that you had prior to becoming pregnant. If you are used to running, doing yoga, going to the gym etc. then keep up with the same level.
* High intensity classes are ok, just don’t overdo it, allow yourself time to rest and recover.
* Just like with nutrition, listen to and honor your body. If it’s feeling restless, give it activity, if it’s feeling exhausted, give it rest.

**Other Lifestyle Bits**

For couples actively coping with infertility, it is advised that they plan for 3 months of treatment before expecting a successful pregnancy. There is only one window of opportunity every month to become pregnant, and it’s important to allow time for the herbs and acupuncture to rebalance and nourish the reproductive systems. Additionally, it is crucial to refrain from placing blame or fault and staying in a place of compassion and patience for yourself and your partner. Practicing healthy lifestyle and stress management habits like meditation, yoga, journaling, or other hobbies that make you feel calm and joyful are extremely helpful for staying in a place of balance.

* Try to maintain a normal, healthy routine as much as possible. Introducing too many new things at once can be a little stressful on the body.
* Take a few minutes each day and place your hands on your belly and just send some loving thoughts and feelings to yourself. This will naturally bring your body into a place of peace both physically and mentally, which will also bring your baby into that same place.
* Jacuzzis/Tubs: excessive use is not recommended, however a few days per week for 10-15min is ok at a moderate temperature.
* Abdominal Breathing: this is a great mind/body relaxation tool. Place your hand on your belly and breathe deeply in with your nose allowing your belly to fill. Then breathe out with your mouth and allow your breath to completely empty. Do this for a few minutes.