

Traditional Chinese medicine makes fertility treatments more effective: study

January 9, 2012

Traditional Chinese medicine has long been used to ease pain, treat disease, boost fertility, and prevent miscarriage. Known in the Western medical community by its acronym TCM, these traditional remedies include herbal preparations and acupuncture. Now Tel Aviv University researchers have discovered that a combination of TCM therapy and intrauterine insemination (IUI) is a winning solution for hopeful mommies who are having trouble conceiving.

In the first study that measures the effectiveness of both herbs and acupuncture in combination with IUI [infertility treatment](#), Dr. Shahar Lev-Ari and Keren Sela of TAU's Sackler Faculty of Medicine and the Tel Aviv Medical Center say that the results, which have been published in the *Journal of Integrative Medicine*, show a significant increase in fertility when the therapies are administered side-by-side.

When combining IUI with TCM treatments, 65.5 percent of the test group were able to conceive, compared with 39.4 percent of the [control group](#), who received no herbal or acupuncture therapy. The method is as "close to nature" as possible and can be used by women employing sperm donors, or after a partner's sperm is centrifuged to enhance its motility in the uterus.

Age-old therapies, contemporary medicine

Dr. Lev-Ari, a cellular biologist and head of the [integrative medicine](#) unit, works with both [medical doctors](#) and TCM practitioners at Tel Aviv Medical Center's Fertility Research Institute. He and Sela, a TCM practitioner specializing in women's health, have long been interested in how Chinese herbal and acupuncture therapies could work to boost Western-style fertility treatments, contributing to an increase in conception and take-home baby rates.

In a retrospective study, Dr. Lev-Ari and Sela followed the progress of 29 women between the ages of 30 and 45 who were receiving IUI treatment combined with TCM therapy, and

Traditional Chinese medicine makes fertility treatments more effective: study

compared their results to a control group of 94 women between the ages of 28 and 46 who were undergoing IUI treatment alone. In addition to their IUI treatments, the 29 women in the first group received weekly sessions of acupuncture and a regime of Chinese medicinals, which consisted of powdered or raw Chinese herbs such as PeoniaAlbae and Chuanxiong, designed to meet each woman's specific needs. All herbal preparations were approved by the Israeli Health Ministry.

In terms of both conception and take-home baby rates, the test group fared far better than the control group. Out of the 29 women in the test group, 65.5 percent conceived, and 41.4 percent delivered healthy babies. In the control group, only 39.4 percent conceived and 26.9 percent delivered. The vast difference in success rates is even more surprising when the age of the average participant was taken into account, Dr. Lev-Ari and Sela note. "The average age of the women in the study group was 39.4, while that of the control group was 37.1. Normally, the older the mother, the lower the pregnancy and delivery rates," they explain.

Promoting balance and harmony in the womb

According to the researchers, TCM is aimed at correcting imbalances in the body's natural energy flow, promoting an overall sense of well-being. There are several theories as to why Chinese medicine can be beneficial to fertility rates, including the possibility that herbal remedies and acupuncture can affect the ovulation and menstrual cycle, enhance blood flow to the uterus, and enhance endorphin production and secretion to inhibit the central nervous system and induce calm — all of which can contribute to successful conception.

Now that the researchers have established that TCM can have a major impact on the success of fertility treatments, they plan to design randomized clinical trials, including placebos, to further validate their initial findings.

Provided by Tel Aviv University