



Enhancing Fertility with Chinese Medicine: Nourishing the Essence

Conceiving a child has become a monumental task for many couples today. Over the last 25-30 years women have changed their focus from starting a family to completing their education, having careers and pursuing their hobbies. For many women, it is not until they are in their mid to late 30's that conceiving children becomes a priority. At this time a woman's fertility is starting to wind down hormonally. Factors such as daily stress, overuse of antibiotics, NSAIDs or antihistamines and environmental pollutants can also imbalance hormone levels. Environmental factors such as pollution, chemicals and hormones in foods have affects on male sperm count as well. Other factors that affect fertility are alcohol and/or drug abuse, smoking, renal disease and thyroid disorders. The average male sperm count dropped 45% from 113 million per ml in 1940 to 66 million per ml in 1990.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) can be used as sole therapy for infertility or as an adjunct to ART (assisted reproductive technology). ART involves being under the care of a Reproductive Endocrinologist (RE). REs use Western medical techniques such as hormonal therapy, IUI (intrauterine insemination) or IVF (in vitro fertilization). Many RE's now work with Chinese medicine practitioners to assist with treatments. There can be as much as a 10-15% increase in conception when used adjunctively. This means a conception rate with IVF of 25-30% can jump to 35-45% depending partly on the woman's age and other factors.

Acupuncture and Chinese herbs help to improve egg and sperm quality, increase the flow of blood and lining of the uterus. Chinese medicine can also help to regulate hormones by increasing fertilization and implantation of the egg. Acupuncture and Chinese herbs can regulate menses, treat pcos and prevent recurrent miscarriages. TCM provides a natural approach to gently nourish and encourage the body towards conception.

The first step in knowing what is occurring in a woman's cycle is to ask her to take her temperature daily (BBT or basal body temperature) and chart it along with changes in vaginal mucus. Weekly acupuncture treatments will be given with various herbal formulas to coincide with the menstrual cycle. Men can be treated weekly with acupuncture and supplemented with an herbal formula. Dietary and lifestyle changes will also be discussed.

In order to facilitate the most optimal conditions for conception, couples should expect at least 3-6 months of treatment. Many times couples may need as much as a year of treatment depending on the situation.

-Sharon McDermott, L. Ac.