

THE World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 10 per cent of women suffer from infertility.

As a result, more and more couples are turning to Assisted Reproductive Treatment (ART) such as in-vitro fertilisation and intrauterine insemination.

However, many are going one step further: alongside ART, women are undergoing acupuncture and other forms of Chinese medicine to increase their chances of getting pregnant.

But can acupuncture help a woman conceive?

In Western medicine, infertility is defined as the inability to conceive despite having unprotected sexual intercourse for a year or longer.

It may be caused by lifestyle and environmental changes, stress levels, hereditary conditions and other factors.

THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH

According to Chinese medicine practitioners, infertility may also be the result of weak qi (energy flow) or disrupted qi flow.

Acupuncture is a 2,000-year-old practice that originated from China and is one of the many forms of traditional Chinese medicine.

Over the years, it has gained popularity as a complement to ART in the treatment of infertility.

Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of acupuncture in improving fertility and increasing ART success rates.

A paper published in 2002 by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine highlighted a study in which 160 patients undergoing ART were divided into two test groups — embryo transfer with acupuncture; and the control group, which underwent embryo transfer without acupuncture.

The first group of patients underwent acupuncture sessions 25 minutes before and after embryo transfer and the outcome of the research revealed that the acupuncture group recorded 42.5 per cent in clinical pregnancies, while the control group recorded 26.3 per cent, indicating that acupuncture does indeed contribute to a higher pregnancy rate after ART.

According to Sin Yen Suan, clinician-in-charge of the Chinese Medicine Centre at IMU Healthcare (IMUH), acupuncture helps

Infertility is resulting in many couples turning to ART to have a family.



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Acupuncture and ART

The ancient Chinese art of healing may have a role to play in fertility treatment

Acupuncture involves inserting sterile and disposable, hair-thin needles into various meridian points to help correct the qi flow.

Sin Yen Suan



by improving uterine artery flow, decreasing uterine contractions, and supporting endometrial lining and implantation, all of which can help increase the likelihood of conception.

"Acupuncture involves inserting sterile and disposable, hair-thin needles into various meridian points to help correct the qi flow," says Sin, an experienced Chinese medicine practitioner specialising in

treating male and female reproductive issues.

"It can stimulate the brain to regulate the body's neuroendocrine system and help the flow of hormones stimulating the adrenal glands, ovaries and other organs and systems related to reproduction."

Women who have irregular menstrual cycles benefit from acupuncture because it helps restore balance to the qi, promotes



The chances of pregnancy through fertility treatment may improve with acupuncture as a complementary therapy.

PICTURE DESIGNED BY VALERIA_AKSAKOVA / FREEPIK

fertility treatment.

However, everyone reacts differently. Some may take up to a year to conceive, especially if the woman is over 40," she says.

Chep notes that many people still do not realise that stress can significantly affect a person's ability to conceive.

Many women are stuck in a perpetual cycle of stress due to the inability to conceive, especially after repeated tries. This further decreases their chances of a successful pregnancy.



Lee says even with acupuncture, everyone reacts differently and some women may take up to a year to conceive, especially if they are over 40.

According to a study by the Boston University School of Public Health, higher levels of stress are associated with lower odds of conception for women.

Stress and anxiety can hinder pregnancy as cortisol, the body's main stress hormone, may affect ovulation.

Acupuncture can help reduce stress by utilising the body's natural antidepressants. It does this by encouraging the body to release endorphins that lower stress levels.

But another IMUH Chinese medicine practitioner, Cheah Chin Chin, cautions that while acupuncture is a safe, affordable and non-invasive complementary treatment, couples should be diligent in doing their research.

Check with bodies such as the Federation of Chinese Physicians and Acupuncturists Association of Malaysia or the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Division under the Ministry of Health to ensure that the acupuncturist is licensed and experienced, says Cheah.

Also, read up on the topic to see if it is suitable for you and your partner.

Cheah encourages patients and couples to ask their acupuncturist or Chinese medicine practitioner questions about treatment and the processes involved.

Cheah usually asks patients questions about their medical history, lifestyle and nutrition prior to treatment.

She also explains the treatment in detail to help patients understand the procedures and to let them decide whether they are comfortable to proceed.

blood flow to the pelvic area and regulates the menstrual cycle, explains Sin.

Ideally, a woman should have a menstrual cycle of 28-35 days for good eggs but some women have a shorter cycle of 21 days while others have a longer cycle of 60 days.

Sin explains that the first step is to check whether infertility is being caused by disrupted qi flow due to a poor lifestyle, pre-existing conditions, diseases or other factors.

Chep Lee Lu Siang, a Chinese medicine practitioner at IMUH, says that she has seen many patients successfully conceive after combining acupuncture with fertility treatment.

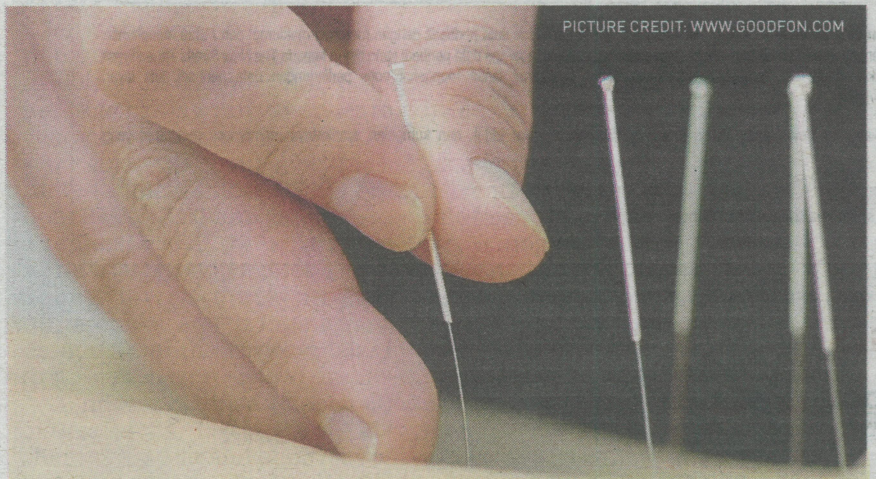
"There is a documented case where a patient conceived within a month after undergoing Chinese medicine and

Cheah says it is always important to do your research before diving head-first into acupuncture.



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Acupuncture is one of many forms of traditional Chinese medicine.