



# AcuBalance

Acupuncture & Integrative Medicine



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## **Fertility Support Program**

For many, there is no greater joy than creating and bringing new life into the world and being a parent. And while the journey of creating life is a natural process, it often comes with challenges and at the very least, a need for extra self-care. For women, there are many reasons that it can be difficult to have a viable pregnancy. Biological conditions like ovulatory failure/defect, blocked fallopian tubes, endometriosis, fibroids/polyps, PCOS, pelvic adhesions, hormonal imbalances, autoimmune conditions like Hashimoto's, pelvic inflammatory disease, and poor egg quality can contribute to infertility or difficulty conceiving. Additionally, factors such as overwork, strain, stress, poor diet, and excessive/lack of exercise can throw the body off balance. It's important to also point out that difficulty conceiving and infertility is by no means just a women's issue. Men can also face biological challenges like as low sperm counts, poor sperm motility, obstructions, and some genetic conditions – and yes, men are just as susceptible to those same stress and lifestyle factors as well.

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

The TCM approach to fertility embraces the idea that reproduction is a natural process. When there is difficulty, the approach is to work with nature to harmonize your body and mind thus allowing your body to do what it is designed to do. Of course, there is always possibility that a child cannot be conceived naturally or even with the assistance of Assisted Reproductive Technology. In those cases, we firmly believe in providing a compassionate and supportive environment to help our patients cope and maintain wellness as they decide whether or not they want to explore other options for starting a family.

TCM can be utilized as a stand-alone treatment, but we believe in a multi-pronged approach that includes improving reproductive health literacy, nutritional guidance, self-care guidance, vitamin/supplement guidance, and collaboration with additional clinicians such as OB-GYNs, midwives, reproductive endocrinologists, doulas, and more. 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. TCM will also work on addressing primary and secondary factors contributing to fertility struggles including: hormonal deficiencies, thin endometrial lining, luteal phase defects, endometriosis, PCOS, sperm abnormalities, thyroid & other hormonal imbalances, blocked fallopian tubes, inflammatory issues, and issues impacting mental and emotional health.

## Primary goals of Fertility Support

- **Improved reproductive health literacy** – get to know your body and cycles to give you the best chance of conceiving. We will discuss various tracking options (menstrual charting, temperature, cervical mucous, cervical texture/position, OPK test kits) and what they mean. We can also discuss how to properly schedule any desired labs or imaging that might be needed to identify underlying issues.
- **Improved egg quality** - Many women are told that their eggs “are what they are and there’s nothing that can be done about them”, but the latest research suggests the exact opposite; egg quality is one of the most important factors in achieving a healthy and successful pregnancy. We will discuss nutrition, supplements, acupuncture treatments, and other lifestyle behaviors that can improve egg quality.
- **Improving uterine circulation & tone** – as you may know, blood is what brings nourishment to our cells. One of acupuncture’s shining roles in health is improving circulation and cell nourishment, which will improve your overall reproductive health including ovarian and fallopian function, proper endometrial thickening, and proper hormonal fluctuations throughout your cycle.
- **Balancing hormones** – This one is a bit finicky – because despite what other providers may tell you, there are no acupuncture points that will specifically cause increases or decreases in reproductive hormones. HOWEVER – by timing your treatments to certain part of your cycles, acupuncture can support those natural fluctuations by influencing the right channels at the right time. For example, if you come in for a treatment during the follicular phase, we will provide a treatment designed to support egg quality, follicle development, and blood flow. If you come in close to ovulation we will utilize points designed to support the pituitary gland to release luteinizing hormone and support the ovaries in releasing an egg. If you come in shortly after ovulation, we will utilize points to support progesterone release and implantation.
- **Promoting general health** – While you do not need to be a perfect picture of health to conceive, it’s never a bad idea to ensure that all your systems are working to the best of their ability. Acupuncture will provide support to your physical health and mental/emotional health as you begin your journey to parenthood.

## Acupuncture Treatment

During the course of treatment, regular acupuncture is best on a weekly, or biweekly basis so we can fine tune your body to be at its optimal health at the various stages of your cycle. Acupuncture at any phase will be working on your underlying constitution to help give you’re your best shot at a viable pregnancy, but there are some specifics we try to accomplish at each phase.

## Herbal Treatment

In some cases, herbal treatments are used. Herbal formulas can be used in conjunction with acupuncture or in lieu of acupuncture and can be used for the same conditions that acupuncture treats.

## Nutrition

In TCM, food is where we derive “post-heaven essence” and it is the raw materials that our body uses to keep itself nourished and active. I can’t stress enough how important nutrition is for health and wellness, especially in terms of fertility and pregnancy.

### 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 (not what makes your tongue happy, what makes your body FEEL optimal and functional).

### 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 & processed meats
- Soft cheeses (goat, brie etc)
- “Cold” foods (see below)

### Warm vs Cold Food

In TCM, food is believed to hold energetic properties that pertain to degrees of cold and heat. During pregnancy, it’s 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.
- If you are inactive right now – please do yourself a big favor and start some regular activity. Even if it's only for 15min a few days week! Almost every OB & Midwife I've connected with has said that regular exercise dramatically improves pregnancy outcomes, especially in terms of ease of labor.

## **Other Lifestyle Bits**

For couples actively coping with infertility, as much as I would love to promise a baby right away, please remember that this kind of balancing takes time. 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. For more customized recommendations for stress management, ask your acupuncturist or preferred healthcare provider.

## **Recommended Reading**

1. Hormone Intelligence – By Aviva Romm
2. It Starts with the Egg – by Rebecca Fett
3. The Infertility Cure – by Randine Lewis
4. The Natural Pregnancy Book – by Aviva Romm
5. Wild Feminine – by Tami Lynn Kent Kent, Tami Lynn. Wild Feminine. Atria Books/Beyond Words.
6. 4 Seasons in 4 Weeks – by Suzanne Mathis McQueen

I hope you found this information helpful and wish you my absolute best as you start this next phase of your life!