

Acupuncture: *a Fertile Idea*

Can acupuncture offer a natural fertility aid to couples struggling to get pregnant? Just ask the McSheffertys.

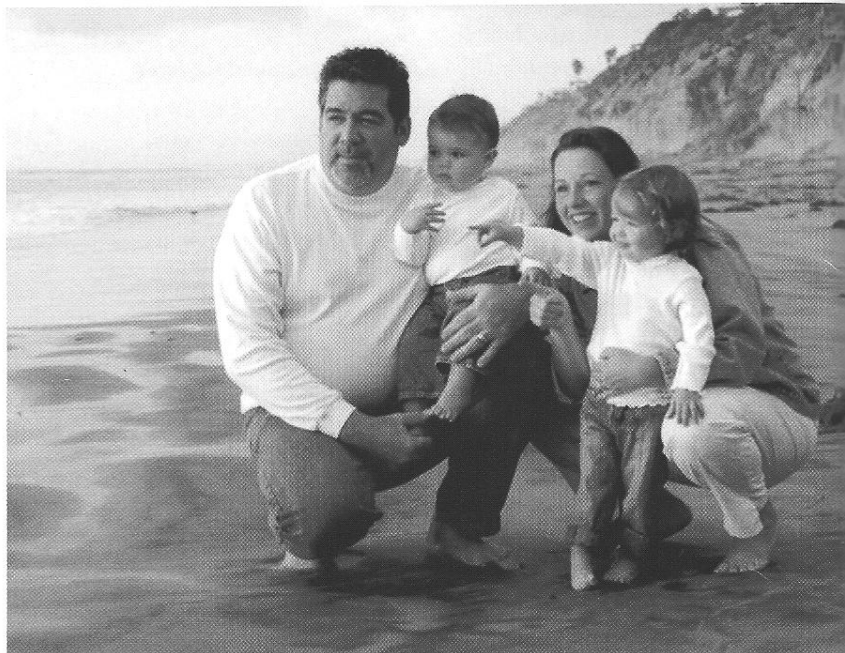
By Terri Miracle

Remember that advertising slogan, “Only your hairdresser knows for sure”? For Sean and Valerie McShefferty, what Valerie’s hairdresser knew provided valuable information about acupuncture and natural fertility programs.

The McSheffertys, residents of San Diego at the time, were growing anxious about having a baby because of their age. At that time, Valerie was 38 and Sean was 40. Then one day, during a conversation at her hair salon, Valerie’s stylist told her about acupuncturist Nicole McNerney, referring to her as a “fertility guru.” McNerney is currently the owner of Remember to Breathe, a natural health center, and is a licensed acupuncturist and herbalist who is certified in natural fertility management and infant massage instruction.

“I was immediately into it, especially because it seemed a lot better for my health and well-being,” Valerie says. Although she wasn’t discouraged about conceiving, she said she had a difficult time with her first in vitro fertilization (IVF) cycle. “I was hyper-stimulated; a lot of fluid was in me. I looked like I was eight months pregnant. Even when Sean rolled over in bed, it hurt. I didn’t even go out. After going through that, I’m very sympathetic to people who have chronic pain.”

Valerie proposed the idea of meeting with McNerney to her husband, who was supportive and open-minded. After their initial session, Nicole started the couple on a pre-conception program that was scheduled for a minimum of four months. The treatment is based on training McNerney received from Francesca Naish, a naturopath and owner of the Jocelyn Center for Natural Fertility Management and Holistic Health in Sydney, Australia.



McNerney met with the couple once a week for nine months. Although she had already been treating women for natural fertility, this was the first couple she had worked with. She said that for both women and the men, a good reproductive program helps to increase their reproductive health, strengthen their immune system, reduce stress, and improve their body’s nutritional status.

“The program is really about getting your body in the best shape possible before you conceive,” McNerney said.

In addition to providing acupuncture and massage, McNerney also worked with the couple on their whole health history, diet, sleep, bowel movements, vitamins and nutrition, exercise, charting ovulation, and lifestyle counseling. Valerie read books on natural fertility to gain a broader understanding of the program.

Valerie and Sean were also seeing Jon H. Lischke, M.D., a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist. Lischke is a member of IGO (Infertility, Gynecology and Obstetrics) Medical Group in San Diego, which achieved the city’s first IVF pregnancy in 1983.

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According to Dr. Lischke, it's becoming quite common for infertility patients to see an acupuncturist. "People seem to be very interested in it, and are pleased with the results," he says. "We feel very enthusiastic about it."

Dr. Lischke says he thinks acupuncture helps reduce anxiety related to undergoing an IVF procedure. "It [IVF] takes a great commitment both emotionally and financially for people. There are very positive reasons why people are doing this [acupuncture]."

Seeking assistance from Eastern and Western medical practices just made sense to Valerie. "I said that no matter what, however I got pregnant, I wanted to bring the baby into

the world in the healthiest way we could," Valerie says. "You get an understanding of how everything you put in your body affects the baby."

Valerie said that her favorite part of the natural fertility program was the massage, but that her least favorite part was taking the Chinese herbs in liquid form. As for Sean, he liked both the acupuncture treatments and the massage. The diet component proved to be more challenging for him. "We had to chart everything we ate, our bowel movements ... and Sean wasn't into that," Valerie says.

Concerned that the passage of time might make conception more difficult, Valerie and Sean decided to have IVF again. Although the second treatment was unsuccessful, the couple remained optimistic and continued to see Nicole McInerney while they consulted with another fertility specialist in Los Angeles. Nicole even accompanied the couple to their doctor's appointments twice.

"Nicole was just a huge support for me," Valerie says. She also said that the acupuncture Nicole provided helped her relax.

With the third IVF treatment, Valerie conceived, and John McShefferty IV arrived in December 2005. The couple also adopted a daughter, Grace. Now Valerie, 44, and Sean, 46, currently residents of Oceanside, California, are planning to have another child. Valerie says they would be consulting with Nicole again.

Even without infertility issues, Valerie said she would recommend acupuncture. "The biggest benefit is getting yourself in good health." ●

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