



# Acupuncture and TCM

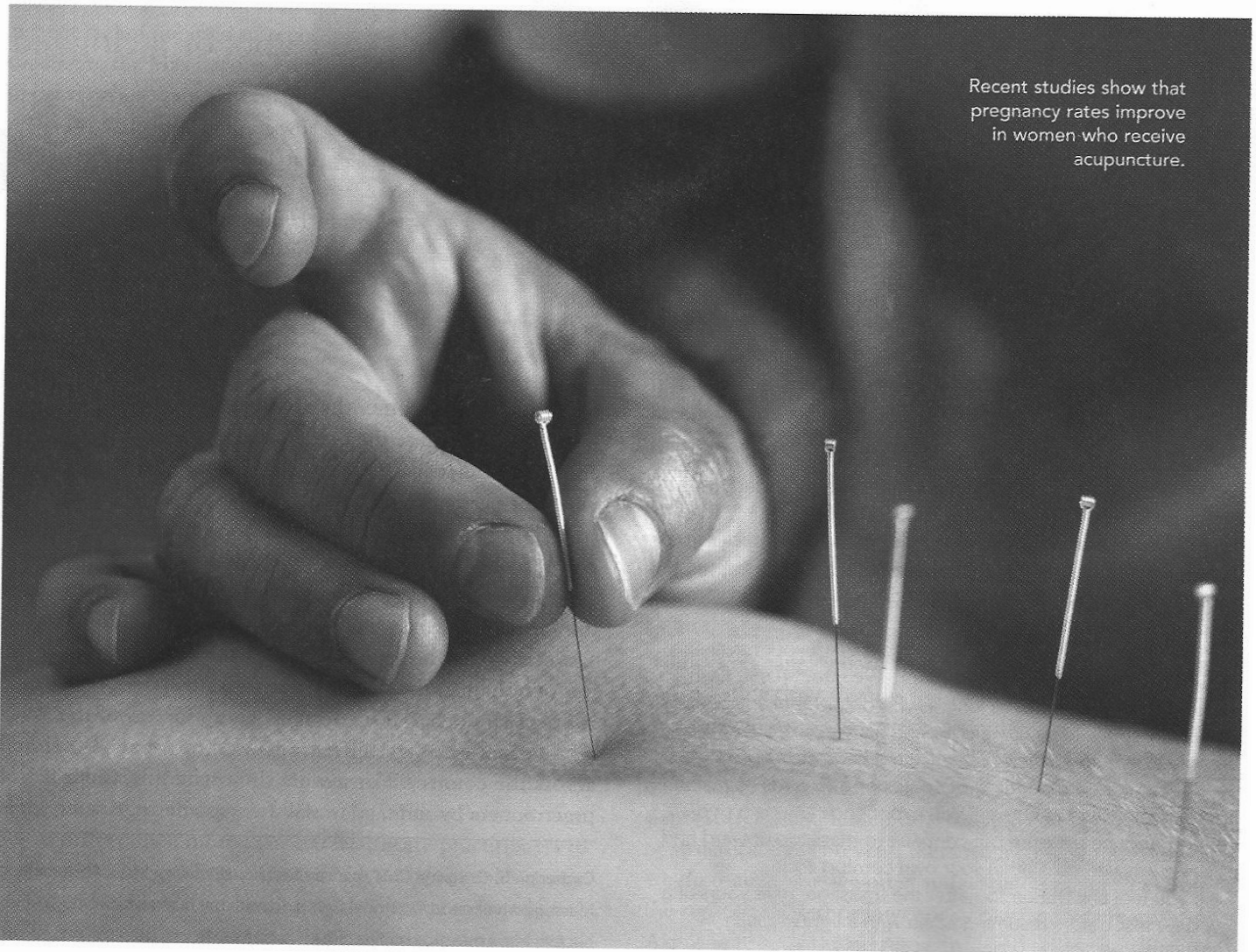
By Catherine S. Gregory

Unlock your body's fertile energy with Traditional Chinese Medicine.

After Veronica Skudlarczyk of Denver tried unsuccessfully for almost a year to get pregnant, she turned to a reproductive endocrinologist recommended by a friend. Following a series of fertility tests, which revealed nothing obvious, Skudlarczyk learned she had "unexplained ovarian dysfunction." She became suspicious when the doctor said they could "work around her ovaries" and prescribed a powerful fertility drug.

Instead of filling that prescription, Skudlarczyk made an appointment with Jane Gregorie, a licensed acupuncturist and owner of Acupuncture Denver. Gregorie, who practices Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), administered acupuncture treatments to help regulate Skudlarczyk's men-

strual cycles and to move energy to her reproductive organs so her ovaries could recover from 14 years of birth control use. Gregorie also recommended dietary changes and Chinese herbs to support her patient's healing. Skudlarczyk's cycle came into balance within just three months, and after



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adding a couple of months of Maya uterine massage (see page 76), she was able to conceive a child.

Traditional Chinese Medicine looks at fertility through the lens of a patient's life force, or qi. According to Stephanie Gianarelli, LAc, owner of Acupuncture Northwest in Seattle, en-

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ergy imbalances in the spleen, liver, and/or kidneys can cause irregular menses. By enhancing the health of those organs through acupuncture and lifestyle changes, Gianarelli says, a woman can regain her fertility and improve her overall health.

Despite its thousands of years of success in China and Japan, acupuncture is just now being recognized by Western fertility doctors as having a positive outcome on their procedures. A German study published in the journal *Fertility and Sterility* in April 2002 showed that pregnancy rates improved in patients who received acupuncture while undergoing assisted reproductive therapies. Women who received acupuncture immediately before and after embryo transfer had a clinical pregnancy rate of 42.5 percent versus 26.3 percent in the control group.

The University of Washington in Seattle and Acupuncture Northwest are replicating that research, which is referred to as the Paulus study. In her private practice, Gianarelli treats clients she describes as stressed-out, Type-A personalities in their mid-30s and early 40s who frequently show up at her clinic with diagnoses such as male factor infertility and hormonal imbalances.

Skudlarczyk says watching friends endure the stress of high-tech fertility treatments reaffirmed her decision to choose more natural alternatives. A study conducted in 2003 by Cardiff University in Wales showed that medical fertility procedures compound the stress of not being able to conceive, further decreasing the chance of a successful pregnancy.

When stress hormones dominate, the reproductive hormones can't work, says Dr. Randine Lewis, LAc, Houston-based author of *The Infertility Cure* (Little, Brown, 2005). Western doctors pronounced Lewis infertile, but she found her path to motherhood through TCM and acupuncture. "We are now told that once we're over the age of 35, 'you better hurry up and do something or you'll never have a child.' That, I think, is the most damaging message a woman can receive because it causes way more stress and fear and anxiety and keeps us from a positive outcome no matter what we do."

Studies have shown that acupuncture has a sedating effect on the nervous system—a plus for those enduring the stress of not being able to conceive, no matter what methods of treatment they seek. Outside of acupuncture needling, Gregorie helps patients reduce stress and tonify reproductive organs through a fertility-enhancing movement class that mixes qi gong, yoga, breathwork, meditation, and visualization.

Suzanne Dubrow, 40, a broadcast journalist from Los Angeles, spent three years and more than \$30,000 to endure three failed intrauterine inseminations (IUIs), two failed in vitro fertilizations (IVFs), and the emotional trauma of two miscarriages before her doctor suggested she use donor eggs.

"I kept asking the doctor what I could do to help this process, and he said 'nothing,'" Dubrow recalls. "I just knew intuitively there had to be something I could do." After the second failed IVF, she went online and found information about Lewis. A couple of months after attending one of Lewis' fertility retreats, feeling better than ever from a new regimen of nutrition, herbs, and acupuncture treatments, Dubrow and her husband decided to try a third IVF. This time, her body was strong enough to sustain the pregnancy. Recalling the experience of bringing her son, Griffin, into the world still brings her to tears, and she says her life changed on many levels once she began to approach her fertility from the TCM perspective. "I didn't feel helpless anymore," she says. "I felt empowered and strong and able to take control of my own destiny."

"It's the relationship between the brain, the pituitary gland, and the reproductive organs themselves that allows the expression of fertility," Lewis says. "When that relationship is out of balance, nature dictates that you are not supposed to be

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pregnant." TCM and acupuncture successfully enhance fertility because they work to bring all systems in the body into a state of balance. Perhaps the deeper message is that our fertility depends on our overall state of being—not just balance on the physical plane, but harmony within the body, mind, and spirit.