

Acupuncture, Massage, and Nutritional Support for IUI & IVF

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We are fortunate to live in an era where western medical and complementary treatments are available for people struggling with fertility challenges. For many, intra uterine insemination (IUI) and in-vitro fertilization (IVF) help bring their children into the world. Acupuncture, Maya Abdominal Massage, and nutritional support can improve success rates, reduce stress, and provide pregnancy support.

Studies prove acupuncture increases the success rates for IVF and other assisted reproduction therapies (ARTs). Acupuncture increases implantation, pregnancy and birth rates while improving responses to stimulation drugs when proper point selection and technique are used. Acupuncture, Maya Abdominal Massage, and nutritional support to enhance fertility have been used for over 2500 years with considerable success. Incorporating complementary treatments to support western medicine provides a balanced treatment approach.

To reduce side effects and increase success of ARTs, weekly treatments are recommended as soon as birth control pills, ovarian suppression, or stimulating drugs are used. To increase the thickness of the uterine lining and regulate the blood flow to the uterus, up to six weeks of treatments are recommended prior to an embryo transfer. To regulate hormones, increase the number of follicles, and improve egg quality, three to six months of treatments are needed. The ovaries begin maturing eggs ten months prior to ovulation and during these earlier stages of development, acupuncture and dietary changes make a significant difference in egg quality.

If prior IUI or IVF cycles have failed, or if long-term use of hormone supplementation has occurred, women may feel irritable, depressed, or have irregular menstrual cycles. Between two and nine months of complementary treatments may be needed in these situations to achieve pregnancy.

Dr. Lifang Liang, a leading authority in reproductive health, has been practicing and teaching Chinese medicine for over 25 years with over 10 years specializing in treating infertility. We follow Dr. Liang's protocol from *Acupuncture and IVF, Increase IVF Success by 40-60%* and adjust for the individual needs of each client. *The Infertility Cure*, by Randine Lewis, explains how acupuncture, nutrition, and Chinese herbal medicine can enhance fertility.

At Isthmus Acupuncture Center, LLC, we specialize in fertility enhancement and pregnancy support. We accommodate the special needs of IUI and IVF cycles and understand the interaction between western and holistic treatments.

Acupuncture Research and IVF

- **Influence of Acupuncture on the pregnancy rate in patients who undergo assisted reproduction therapy:** Paulus, *et.al.* Fertility and Sterility Vol: 77, No. 4, April 2002. *This landmark study demonstrated that women undergoing acupuncture treatments with a specific acupoint protocol had an increase in ongoing pregnancy rates of over 60%, compared to control subjects that did not receive acupuncture.*
- **A randomized, double-blind, controlled cross-over study evaluating acupuncture as an adjunct to in-vitro fertilization:** Quintero *et.al.* Fertility and Sterility Vol: 81, Supplement 3, April, 2004. *This pilot study examined prior IVF failures where researchers used a completely different acupuncture protocol. Researchers found a 180% increase in implantation rates, a 60% increase in ongoing pregnancies, and a significant reduction in the amount of gonadotrophins used.*
- **Acupuncture & IVF poor responders: a cure?:** Magarelli *et.al.* Fertility and Sterility Vol: 81, Supplement 3, April, 2004. *This retrospective study found a 39% increase in IVF pregnancy rates with a modified protocol. It examined both poor responders and good responders. Poor responders that received acupuncture had the same pregnancy rates as normal prognosis patients. Poor responders were defined as those with elevated Peak FSH, longer history of infertility, or poor sperm morphology. When poor responders were excluded, the increase in pregnancies went up to 42%. The acupuncture group had significantly lower miscarriages, no ectopic pregnancies and significantly greater live births than the non-acupuncture group.*

- **A matched controlled study to evaluate the efficacy of acupuncture for improving pregnancy rates following in-vitro fertilization - embryo transfer.** Wang et al. Fertility and Sterility Vol: 83, issue 5, Supplement, May 2005. *This study further demonstrates the importance of proper acupoint selection and proper administration of acupuncture protocols. The point protocol in this study varied greatly from previous studies that demonstrated positive pregnancy outcomes. This particular acupoint selection did not produce any increases in pregnancy rates.*
- **Ovarian blood flow responses to electro-acupuncture stimulation at different frequencies and intensities in anaesthetized rats:** Stener-Victorin et.al. Auton Neurosci. 2003 Oct 31;108(1-2):50-6. *This study demonstrated that acupuncture can significantly increase or decrease ovarian blood flow, depending on how the protocol is applied. This is an important warning that improper application of acupuncture could hinder an IVF cycle.*
- **Reduction of blood flow impedance in the uterine arteries of infertile women with electro-acupuncture:** Stener-Victorin et.al. Hum Reprod. 1996 Jun;11(6):1314-7. *Successful IVF and embryo transfer require optimal endometrial receptivity at the time of implantation. The amount of blood flow to the uterus is considered valuable in assessing endometrial receptivity. This study showed that an eight treatment protocol was able to significantly increase blood flow to the uterus and may explain one mechanism for the substantial increases in pregnancies when acupuncture is properly incorporated into an IVF cycle.*
- **The pain-relieving effect of electro-acupuncture and conventional medical analgesic methods during oocyte retrieval: a systematic review of randomized controlled trial.** Stener-Victorin E. Hum Reprod. 2004 Nov 11. *This review demonstrated that acupuncture analgesic effects are equal to conventional analgesic medication for oocyte retrieval. This is an important alternative for patients who are allergic or sensitive to analgesic medications.*

Recommended Schedule for IVF Cycle

Preparation for IVF Cycle:

A combination of weekly acupuncture treatments and supporting holistic treatments including Maya Abdominal Massage, Reiki, therapeutic massage, and dietary changes will be recommended for two to six months prior to an IVF cycle. Individual treatment plans will be outlined during the initial consultation.

Eight to three weeks pre egg transfer:

- Weekly acupuncture treatments should be continued for the two months prior to the estimated egg transfer date or as soon as birth control pills or suppression is started, whichever is earlier.
- Monthly Maya Abdominal Massage and self-care should be continued during this time except during menses.
- Discontinue Chinese herbs that influence hormones and the ovaries. Nutritional supplements and prenatal vitamins should be continued.

Three weeks pre egg retrieval to egg transfer:

Acupuncture should be scheduled:

- 1 to 3 days prior to estimated menstrual period.
- Within 2 days of beginning the ovarian stimulation medications, and thereafter every 3-4 days for a total of 3 treatments during the ovarian stimulation cycle.

Maya Abdominal Massage self-care should be continued during the first week of the stimulation cycle.

After egg retrieval:

- Schedule acupuncture on the afternoon of the egg retrieval to relieve bloating, pain, and potential side effects of an ovarian stimulation.

Morning of embryo transfer:

- Schedule acupuncture to relax the uterus, increase blood flow, and to promote overall relaxation.

Afternoon/evening of embryo transfer:

- Schedule acupuncture immediately after transfer to encourage implantation and regulate hormones.

With positive pregnancy test:

- Schedule weekly acupuncture for 3 weeks until heartbeat is confirmed on ultrasound. Schedule weekly acupuncture through the first trimester to promote a healthy pregnancy. If there is a history of miscarriage, weekly or bi-weekly acupuncture is recommended to support the pregnancy.

