

Acupuncture



Acupuncture may help with various pregnancy issues, from boosting IVF success to easing nausea and stress

A lot of women experiment with alternative therapies when they decide to start a family, whether it's to help them get pregnant or to cure some of the side effects of early pregnancy.

Acupuncture is one of the most popular. The treatment is based on the belief that an energy, or life force (or 'chi'), flows through the body in channels called meridians. It's thought that when chi cannot flow freely it causes illness, and that inserting needles at points on the body can restore the flow and boost health.

A session costs between £35 to £60, and while it's safe to use in pregnancy, Naava Carman, a fertility and obstetric acupuncturist, says you should only be treated by a registered practitioner. 'Acupuncture is a powerful tool,' she says. 'Stimulating some points can stimulate uterine contractions, so it is important to see a professional obstetric acupuncturist.'

Infertility

Acupuncture can help in a number of ways, says Naava. '70% of the patients we see have PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome, which can cause ovarian

cysts and prevent ovulation). Once we establish that a woman is not ovulating, we can then begin weekly treatment sessions.'

Acupuncture may also help increase the chances of success in IVF. 'It can improve chances by up to 10%,' says Naava. 'It is thought to improve blood flow to the uterus.'

Stress and anxiety

Whether you're trying to conceive or coping with life with a young baby,

stress is common. Naava says, 'Stress can stop you becoming pregnant. It can cause your FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) to rise, which can affect your ability to conceive. Acupuncture can help balance the hormones.'

Morning sickness

Many women experience nausea in pregnancy, most commonly in the first trimester. A review of studies involving 5,000 patients concluded that acupuncture was at least as effective as drugs in controlling post-operative nausea, and it's thought it might help with pregnancy sickness, too. Naava says, 'Stomach chi energy rises in pregnancy. The stimulation of acupuncture points helps release it and rebalance the body.'

Induction

One in every five women has to be induced because they reach 41 weeks with no signs that their baby is about to make an appearance. It may be worth booking a course of acupuncture to see if it can trigger labour. 'There are certain points on the top of the shoulders, tops of the feet and the inside of the lower leg that trigger uterine contractions and cervical stimulation,' says Naava. **PB**

Call the British Acupuncture Council on 020 8735 0400 or visit acupuncture.org.uk for more info.

'Acupuncture helped induce my labour'

'I went 15 days overdue with my first baby and ended up being induced. It was stressful and there was lots of medical intervention. So when I was pregnant with my second baby and went three days overdue, I decided to try acupuncture to bring on labour. My first session involved fine needles being placed into points on my back, hands, legs and the top of the shoulders. The next night, labour began and I had a two-hour, straightforward birth, requiring only gas and air. When I was pregnant with my third, I had my first acupuncture session when I was a day overdue and again two days later. Labour began naturally and I gave birth to my baby girl, at home, in 90 minutes, without needing any pain relief at all.'

Vikki Wilkinson, 31, from Leeds, is mum to Fionnuala, 5 months, Amos, nearly 2, and Archie, 5.

