

Got infertility? Give holistic medicine a shot.

Gone are the days when alternative medicine was considered to be “hip” or just a bunch of hocus-pocus. Today, more and more doctors are combining modern technology with holistic medicine to combat a variety of conditions from migraines to menstrual cramps. Just as alternative therapies such as massage and acupuncture have helped those ailments, doctors are also finding they may even give fertility a nudge.

Simply put, infertility is the inability to conceive despite 12 months of unprotected sexual intercourse. According to the National Survey of Family Growth, infertility affects more than 7 million people across the nation. That number represents 12 percent of women of childbearing age and one in eight couples.

STRESS IS NOT YOUR FRIEND

According to Kenneth Moghadam, M.D., a reproductive endocrinologist and infertility specialist at the Austin Fertility Institute in Texas, there are several clinical studies that link chronic stress to infertility. “We now know that the more stress women experience while trying to get pregnant, the harder it is to get pregnant,” he says. “In general, my infertility patients experience a great deal of stress before they even enter our door. Many of them have tried for months or even years to conceive—without success.”

Dr. Moghadam is among the growing number of infertility specialists that encourages their patients to modulate stress and cultivate balance in their lives while trying to get pregnant.

“We give them hope in the form of proven medical modalities,” he says. “However, all of the tests and treatments can further heighten expectations, and the emotional fall is even deeper if they don’t conceive right away. It’s not realistic to ask my patients not to stress. Alternative therapies such as yoga and meditation are pathways to help relieve anxiety,” he says.

ONE WOMAN’S FERTILITY JOURNEY

Valentina Pollard, 32, knows all too well the highs and lows associated with trying to conceive. Thanks to modern technology and holistic medicine, she is now the mother of not just one healthy baby, but three. Her fertility journey was not an easy one by any means.

“We started trying to have a baby when I was 28 and my husband Blake was 31,” Valentina says. “We were young and healthy, and Blake thought we would get pregnant right away. I was a social worker for an adoption agency, so I know it doesn’t always happen overnight.”

After several months of trying to conceive, Valentina talked with her obstetrician/gynecologist and was prescribed Clomid to stimulate ovulation. “Month after month went by and still I wasn’t pregnant.”

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED...

Valentina says the next step was eight cycles of intrauterine inseminations followed by exploratory surgery. She was diagnosed with severe endometriosis, a leading cause of infertility in women. Valentina decided to call Sadie Minkoff, a licensed acupuncturist and co-founder of Sage Acupuncture in Austin, to find out if traditional Chinese medicine might help to improve her chances of becoming pregnant.

"At that time, I was in a high stress job and our efforts to become pregnant were also a cause for stress. My anxiety level was high," Valentina says. "My desire to be a mother consumed every moment of every day. I couldn't help it. I didn't live by the calendar day... I lived by the cycle day.

"Each month when I got my period I would experience absolute heartbreak," she adds. "Acupuncture was the only thing that helped me to relax."

"Acupuncture is becoming less and less controversial in the treatment of infertility and other reproductive disorders," Minkoff says. "In my practice, I have seen acupuncture's remarkable effect on reducing stress and restoring balance, coupled with its positive influence on pregnancy rates."

It is thought that acupuncture's impact on pregnancy success rates comes in part from its effect on ovarian and uterine blood flow. "This renewed circulation flushes the reproductive organs with oxygen, nutrients and hormones improving follicular growth as well as the uterine environment and making it receptive to embryonic implantation," Minkoff says.

A DREAM COMES TRUE—TIMES THREE

After more than a year of trying to get pregnant, Valentina's gynecologist referred her to Dr. Moghadam. Only one IVF cycle was required and on June 24, 2011 Valentina delivered twin girls Daphne Rose and Poppy Camille. Less than two years later, the Pollards experienced a joyful "surprise" pregnancy – without the help of modern medicine – and welcomed Violet Dauphine to their family on August 14, 2013.

Valentina says her children are a testament to what can happen when you combine cutting-edge techniques with natural methods. "Dr. Moghadam and Sadie helped me achieve my dream of being a mom."

CANT' HURT, CAN HELP!

Although there is no clinical evidence to prove that alternative therapies can cure infertility, they may in fact play a huge role in relieving stress. "I believe that taking a complete approach to patient care – addressing the body, mind and spirit – enables patients to stick to the treatment plan longer," Dr. Moghadam says. "In general, couples that find ways to modulate stress while undergoing advanced reproductive techniques overwhelming stay in treatment longer and will eventually become pregnant."

According to the Society for Reproductive Endocrinology, some of the more popular stress-reducing methods recommended to infertility patients are:

- Acupuncture
- Aerobic exercise
- Journaling
- Listening to music
- Massage therapy
- Meditation
- Reading
- Support groups
- Visualization
- Walking/hiking
- Yoga

In addition to taking advantage of community resources like yoga classes and relaxation therapy, Dr. Moghadam encourages his patients to find ways to cultivate balance in life. In addition to exercise and a healthy diet, he also recommends good “sleep hygiene,” which means avoiding caffeine close to bedtime and anything that can disrupt a good night’s rest.

Getting pregnant isn’t always easy—or fast. But today you don’t need sit idly by and wait for nature to take its course. By combining modern technology with holistic medicine your dream of having a baby can indeed come true.

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