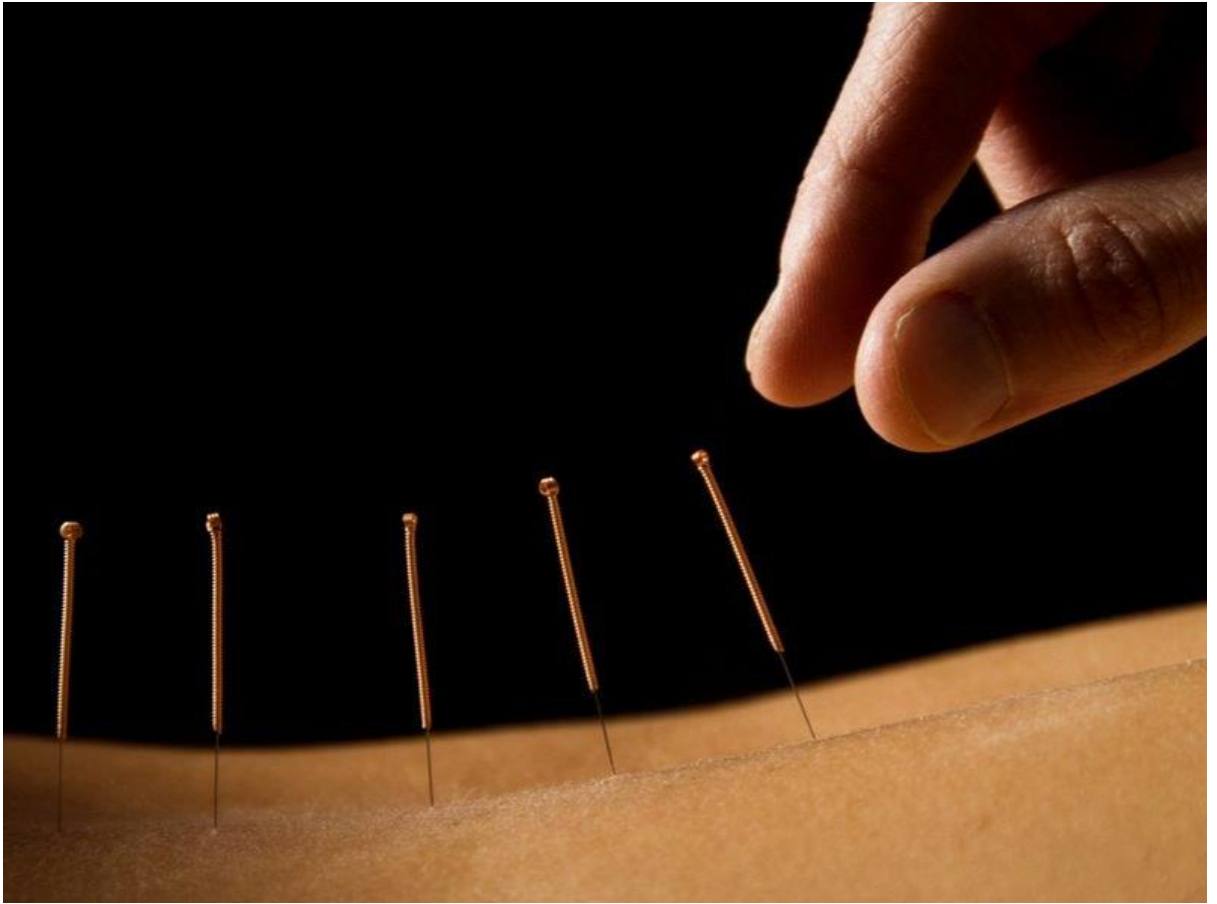


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Boosting IVF success with acupuncture



by Dr Maryam Mahanian DTCM, RAc

Infertility is common, impacting approximately 10% to 18% of couples globally, according to a [study](#) published in the International Journal of Fertility & Sterility

Couples are increasingly turning to fertility treatment, or Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), more now than ever before. Sometimes the decision to embark on IVF can be a difficult one. One big reason for this is because there's no guarantee that the procedure will be a success. So the question remains, is there anything you can do to enhance the success of your IVF cycle?

[Here is where complementary therapies come in](#)

Combining eastern medicine with western medicine has been shown to be incredibly effective for a wide range of health conditions and this is certainly true when it comes to using

acupuncture, a treatment modality used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, to support IVF (In Vitro Fertilization).

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has been used for thousands of years and continues to be used successfully in the area of obstetrics and gynecology, including enhancing fertility.

Nearly [seven million American women](#) will seek fertility treatment during their reproductive years, and surveys suggest between one-quarter and one-half add acupuncture to support their conventional treatments.

Fertility clinics are increasingly recommending acupuncture to their patients and also employ acupuncturists to support patients in-house at the time of embryo transfer. By doing so, they can achieve better results for their patients.

But a common question is how does acupuncture work and what role does it play in supporting an IVF cycle? Here is how acupuncture can work:

Building uterine lining – A nice thick good quality (highly vascularized) uterine lining is key to proper implantation of the embryo. In Chinese medicine, a common cause of a thin uterine lining (less than 6mm is not ideal) is blood deficiency. Some signs of blood deficiency are very light periods, delayed periods, constipation, pale complexion, dry skin, dry eyes, hair loss, anemia, anxiety and insomnia. Acupuncture stimulates blood flow to the uterus to improve the thickness and quality of the uterine lining. Chinese herbal medicine and diet recommendations are often also given to nourish the blood.

Helping ovaries respond better to the stimulation drugs – Acupuncture can regulate hormones and help the ovaries respond better to the stimulation drugs. This results in a larger number of follicles produced in your IVF cycle.

Reducing stress – There is no doubt that going through the IVF journey is stressful and brings about feelings of anxiety. Acupuncture calms the nervous system and greatly helps in reducing the anxiety and stress of going through the IVF procedure. Acupuncture can shift the body from a sympathetic (fight or flight) state to a parasympathetic (relaxed) state. Acupuncture can reduce contractions of the uterus which helps the implantation process.

Improving egg quality – Good egg quality is necessary to a successful IVF cycle. It takes about three months (well, 100 days to be exact) for follicles to mature and develop so having acupuncture for at least three months prior to your IVF cycle will help create the best environment for those maturing and developing follicles.

Reducing the side effects of fertility drugs – Some women may have unpleasant side effects when taking fertility drugs. Breast tenderness, bloating, headaches, upset stomach, hot flashes and mood swings are some common ones. Acupuncture can work to reduce these side effects significantly.

Improving semen quality and quantity – Let's not forget about the men. [Male factor infertility accounts for almost 40% of cases of infertility](#). It takes approximately 74 days for sperm to develop. Men having acupuncture during the time period leading up to an IVF cycle can enhance sperm health. Healthier sperm means a healthier embryo with less chance of miscarriage.

How much acupuncture should you get?


Prior to IVF: I recommend acupuncture weekly for at least three months leading up to an IVF cycle. If you do have the time before your IVF cycle, I suggest to use your time wisely and get your regular acupuncture sessions started. If your IVF cycle is beginning soon and you don't have much time, not to worry! Any acupuncture you can receive will be worthwhile and have a positive effect on preparing your body – even if it's just one or two sessions.

During your IVF cycle: At minimum, I advise patients to have acupuncture twice during the stimulation of ovaries phase (which begins a few days after the menstrual period has begun). I also recommend a treatment before the egg retrieval, before and after the embryo transfer and weekly in your first trimester of pregnancy until you're 13 weeks pregnant.

Finding the right Chinese medicine practitioner

It goes without saying that your Chinese medicine practitioner should be a licensed and board-certified acupuncturist. Further to that, I believe it's important to find a practitioner who has extensive knowledge and experience in the treatment of infertility and the use of acupuncture in support of IVF. Finding the right practitioner that you feel comfortable, at ease and safe with is also vital as you will end up building a close relationship with them as they support you on your journey to becoming a mom.

If you are in the UK, check out the [British Acupuncture Council](#) to find a trusted and regulated therapist. If you are in the US, check out [NCCAOM](#), the **only** national organization that validates entry-level competency in the practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine

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