

## ***Acupuncture might help with fertility***

By Judith Graham | TRIBUNE REPORTER

February 8, 2008

Acupuncture appears to be a useful fertility aid, according to a new report in the British Medical Journal that found pairing acupuncture with in-vitro fertilization can raise a couple's odds of getting pregnant by 65 percent.

In absolute terms, the report found that for every 10 women who supplement IVF with acupuncture, one extra pregnancy will occur. Although that's a "modest" effect, it's important given the emotions and considerable expenses associated with assisted reproduction, said Eric Manheimer, the lead author and a research associate at the University of Maryland Medical School.

The new report – a synthesis of seven previously published studies involving 1,366 patients – doesn't address why acupuncture promotes fertility, which patients benefit or what protocol is optimal.

But experts have several ideas. They suggest that the ancient Chinese practice – which involves inserting needles at strategic locations on a person's body – might enhance blood flow to the uterus, improving the chance that an embryo will successfully implant. Also, it's thought that acupuncture might stimulate the production of hormones that regulate ovulation and fertility and regulate stress, which can interfere with a pregnancy.

Some fertility centers have responded with enthusiasm. "We offer acupuncture to all our IVF patients" and between 10 and 20 percent elect to use it, said Dr. Brian Kaplan, a fertility specialist at Fertility Centers of Illinois. Kaplan cautioned, however, that he couldn't recommend acupuncture as a stand-alone fertility treatment, without IVF.

Other scientists are skeptical. Dr. Norbert Gleicher, president of the Center for Human Reproduction, said he didn't find the scientific literature convincing. Gleicher's fertility centers will arrange for acupuncture occasionally, when patients indicate they want it, he said.

"None of the studies, including this new one, are definitive," agreed Dr. Ralph Kazer, chief of reproductive endocrinology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

Two years ago, Northwestern launched a study of up to 220 women in which half get "sham" acupuncture, with needles placed in the wrong locations, and half get the real thing.

The goal is to determine whether the placement of needles makes a difference or whether the therapy works because women believe it does, Kazer said.

### **Summing it up**

- The study: A review of existing research has found that acupuncture can boost a woman's odds of conceiving.
- The caveats: The results apply only when acupuncture is used with in-vitro fertilization. And not all experts are convinced that it helps.
- Local angle: Fertility centers across Chicago are touting acupuncture as a way to help women get pregnant.
- Drawbacks? There are no harmful effects associated with acupuncture, which calls for needles to be inserted across a woman's body.