

Emotions and Fertility

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A woman wakes up and walks to the bathroom, her pregnancy test kit waiting by the bathroom sink. She waits impatiently for the magical indicator showing that she is pregnant, and feels her throat swell when it shows she is not. The last time she was checking for pregnancy was two decades ago when she was in college. The relief at not being pregnant then was as overwhelming as her desire to be pregnant now. She had no idea that it would be this hard to conceive. She is exasperated that she spent so many years and so much money on birth control when she probably couldn't get pregnant anyway! Practically everyone around her simply had to look at their partners to get pregnant. "Many people have children and don't even want them," she thought. She wanted to scream.

Many women seeking fertility assistance are, with respect to this one issue, emotionally unbalanced. Their desire for offspring reaches so deep, it affects everything in their lives: their romantic relationships, their work, and their friendships. They fear never being able to have a baby, and feel time is running out. Will their partner think less of them? By the time these women reach out to an acupuncturist, they are consumed with wanting a child. They would do almost anything. The ticking of her biological clock is so loud that they can barely hear anything else.

There are so many variables in treatment options when a woman seeks treatment for this issue, that it is not always my first priority to treat her body for conception. For one thing, the woman might be extremely emotionally charged, even slightly unstable. There is fear being bred internally because she thinks she might not be able to bear children. A practitioner's role is not as psychotherapist, but as an advocate for a patient's deepest health that includes mind, body and spirit. The emotions that pulse through a woman who is trying to get pregnant but cannot, run the gamut and often provide the evolution of deeply buried shadows to arise to the surface. This is a time to engage in deep healing, to prepare and orient the deepest creative forces in the body to be in alignment.

Pregnancy is the beautiful orchestration of a healthy body, yet many seemingly healthy bodies have idiopathic infertility with no functional blockages to pregnancy. Instead of focusing on what a woman needs physically to conceive, I might focus instead on balancing her emotions and calming her nervous system. I ground her energy by strengthening her lowest organs, the adrenals and Kidneys, or Kidney Yang, and calm her nervous system, or *Shen*, by nourishing Heart Yin or Blood. I have found the greatest benefit by working with the Extraordinary meridians; the *Chong* and *Ren*. An herbalist can accomplish all of these with herbs, but in an ideal situation, a practitioner would use both herbs and acupuncture.

Times Have Changed

Traditionally, men are the hunters and women are the gatherers. It was the woman's job to garden, gather food, make babies, have dinner ready when the man gets home, and generally, be the feminine, receptive energy. As the hunter, the man's job was to provide for the home, and protect it. He must be the man that makes the woman feel safe and free her to be the feminine energy. In

today's world, roles are not so clearly defined. In our modern day society, women are becoming the hunters as well as gatherers. Our feminine receptive energy is being filled with jobs and careers. When it is time to make a baby, it can start to feel like another project; going to the acupuncturist or fertility doctor is like meeting with your consultant; and taking the morning temperature is project management. Something that started out as fun - making love with your partner - becomes routine and unsexy. The whole process of making a baby becomes traumatic for themselves and their partners.

Thus begins the vicious circle that keeps her infertile. In her desire to get pregnant, and in tracking her own ovulation cycle, she most likely has had sex when she might not be in the mood - more times than she can count. This might have energetically closed her uterus and feminine energy, or *Chong* and *Ren* meridians. Women will tend to use their masculine energy to produce results on a daily basis as well, and since she does not have testosterone to back up the masculine energy, she will use her adrenal hormones. A woman running on adrenal hormones is like a car running on its batteries, rather than on gasoline. This presents a problem because when a man uses his masculine energy, he utilizes his testosterone. Many women are unnaturally competing with men who practically have unlimited quantities of this hormone, manufactured below the belt. This, and other high stressors from our modern-day lifestyle that weaken our adrenals, produces cortisol irregularity, which impedes pregnancy. With these problems, her neurotransmitters and blood sugar might be out of balance, as well. If her GABA - the neurotransmitter that inhibits panic and anxiety - gets low (which is common with adrenal fatigue), then she is prone to be even more anxious about daily life. The same can be true if we speak of this in Chinese medical terms. When the woman depletes her Kidney Yang, she is no longer grounded, thus her Heart is restless, and her *Shen* becomes disturbed.

When a woman wants to become pregnant, she must be in top shape, as if she were going to run a marathon! I often ask my patients to give me a few months to rebuild their body, and make it ready for a healthy pregnancy and birth. The ability of acupuncture to create deep relaxation and allow the body to rest and repair is an incredible gift. Just like yin cannot survive without yang, it is impossible to calm a woman's nervous system or *Shen* if the physical body is not well.

While still partnering with my client's desire to have a baby, I might ask, "What would happen if you didn't conceive immediately? What would happen if you didn't at all?" The intention is not to cloud her mind with doubt, but instead to pull her out of fear-mode. If I am successful in this, suddenly her spirit can become louder than the biological urges. There are many options in treating women with nurturing herbs and formulas to strengthen her body; offer her bovine adrenals, maca, or Kidney tonifying herbs. A few Western herbal recommendations to calm the nervous system are: St. John's wort, Passion flower, Skullcap, and Motherwort. Formulas to calm the *Shen* in Chinese medicine are: *Chai Hu Jia Long Gu Mu Li Tang*, *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang*, *Suan Zao Ren Tang* and *Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan*.

Western medicine has amazing technological advances to help diagnose infertility, and assist women in treatment plans. While studying in the fertility department in Taiwan, I saw first hand treatments such as Intra-Uterine Insemination (IUI), In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF), and ultrasounds. From measuring the thickness of the uterine lining or uterine blood flow to diagnosing endometriosis or poor sperm quality, the advances in Western medicine are remarkable. Many patients will visit their acupuncturist while also working with Western medical practitioners. Acupuncture helps to balance out the emotions, especially when imbalance is brought on by medical treatments that cause hormonal surges in the body. Ask any woman whose biological clock is ticking loudly in their ears. If acupuncture is not successful in causing conception, but can simply relieve the stress in the heat of the moment, and the strong pull of the biological clock

digresses, then it is worth it.

Visit Joni Renee Zalk's website at www.divineacupuncture.com

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