

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Acupuncture and Pregnancy

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Integrative reproductive medicine is rapidly gaining ground in the field of Western reproductive medicine as many of us are becoming common place in the treatment facilities across the United States. With the establishment of the American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine (ABORM) and a doctorate of acupuncture and Oriental medicine (DAOM) program based in reproductive medicine, available at Yosan University in Los Angeles, the field will continue to grow for many decades to come. Fortunately, for those of us in this field, it also provides us with a new source of patients - pregnant women. Many of these are patients whom have already become comfortable with our protocols if they have come to us for fertility treatment, and trust our techniques and professionalism. Consequently, this opens a new facet to our practices and to our own growth within the field of reproductive health care.

Once our patients have been introduced to our protocols and have had success with fertility treatment plans that result in pregnancy, it becomes a natural progression for us to then offer these patients traditional Chinese methods to deal with issues of pregnancy. As many of us have found, Western medicine can be quite reticent to treat conditions in the pregnant patient, preferring to let the condition run its course rather than prescribe medicines that can be harmful to the developing fetus. Fortunately, traditional Chinese medicine offers many alternatives.

As our patients move through the course of the pregnancy, and as the embryo continues to grow, certain conditions become commonplace. Some of the common conditions to arise during pregnancy are mood swings that include depression, skin eruptions (dampness and heat), fluid retention, nausea, fatigue and constipation. These are some of the conditions that we can treat easily and without causing harm to either the fetus or the patient.

For instance, it is not uncommon for the pregnant patient to complain of nausea (in the form of morning sickness). In traditional Chinese medicine this can be due to rebellious stomach *qi* due to deficient spleen *qi*. As the pregnant patient requires a lot of blood, the deficiency of *qi* makes it difficult for the spleen to transform, thus the blood creating the disharmony. The key is to calm the stomach and stop the vomiting. Key points for this can include PC 6 *Neiguan* ("Inner Pass"), St 36 *Zusanli* ("Leg Three Miles") and St 34 *Liangqui* ("Ridge Mound"). The latter is the accumulation point for the stomach, so it can be used for stomach excess causing vomiting.

In cases of pain during pregnancy, the common response within Western medicine may be "Well, you are pregnant, so there's not a lot we can do." Fortunately, as traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, we know that there is a great deal we can do to assist our patients through the pain. However, we must be careful when moving *qi* and blood since we do not wish to disturb the growing fetus.

For conditions involving mood swings (such as anxiety and mental restlessness) arising from Kidney

yin deficiency, K 9 *Zhubin* ("Guest Building") is a great point. This point will help to tonify *yin*, and calm the mind. According to Rabinowitz (see Resources), "Stimulating this point minimizes the transmission of toxins from the mother to the child, increases the health of the baby and its resistance to disease and also tonifies the mother's *qi*."

Skin eruptions that are due to blood heat as a result of ingested foods (such as oranges) can be effectively treated using LI II *Quchi* ("Pool at Bend"). Utilizing this point can reduce the severity of the skin eruption by cooling the blood while the patient follows through with dietary changes using traditional Chinese medicine food-therapy concepts.

Fatigue is another common complaint of the pregnant patient. They are always tired and have no energy. During pregnancy, the growing fetus places a constant demand on the mother. In this particular instance, one can look into blood deficiency, *qi* deficiency and assuring that the mother gets an adequate amount of rest during this time. Acupuncture points used for nausea, can also be used to help generate energy. An example of such a point might be St 36 *Zusanli* ("Leg Three Miles"). This point can be used to tonify *qi* and blood without being a hazard.

The key to treatment is to recognize, first off, that there are points that are simply forbidden to needle. Some of these points are listed in the accompanying chart, but this is not a comprehensive list.

Forbidden Points (not comprehensive)

LI 4 <i>Hegu</i> ("Joining Valley")	Stimulates dispersing and descending, unblocks channels
Sp 6 <i>Sanyinqiao</i> ("Three Yin Meeting")	Unblocks channels, resolves dampness
UB 60 <i>Kunlun</i> ("Kunlun Mountains")	Unblocks channels, invigorates blood
UB 67 <i>Zhiyin</i> ("Reaching Yin")	Unblocks channels (used to reposition the fetus, usually with moxa)
GB 21 <i>Jianjing</i> ("Shoulder Well")	Promotes delivery, promotes lactation
CV (Ren) 4 <i>Guanyuan</i> ("Gate of the Original Qi")	Original <i>qi</i>
CV (Ren) 11 <i>Jianli</i> ("Strengthen the Interior")	Descends <i>qi</i>

Resources:

- Rabinowitz N. Acupuncture and Pregnancy. www.acufinder.com/Acupuncture.
- Deadman P, Al-Khafaji M, Baker K. *A Manual of Acupuncture*. Eastland Press, 1998.
- Flaws B. *Chinese Medical Obstetrics*. Blue Poppy Press, 2005.
- West Z. *Acupuncture in Pregnancy and Childbirth*. Elsevier, 2001.

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