

## Aging, Fertility, and the Liver

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I wonder if bombarding women over 32 years old with regimens, dietary restrictions, and "advice" improves their chance of conceiving and experiencing a healthy live birth of a child. Or does all of the regimenting, calculating, and diligence increase their Liver *qi* stagnation and emotional angst? In my fertility practice, I hear quite a litany of advice in terms of what women are being told to do, or not do, to help them get pregnant. Some of those include: Calculate your ovulation so you can see which are your most fertile days. Take your temperature. Take a prenatal vitamin every day. Eat organic food. Get acupuncture. Don't get acupuncture. Eat all of your food in its natural state. Count your protein grams, fat too. Make certain that you get enough folic acid in your diet. Meditate. Try to eat foods that encourage an alkaline rather than an acidic environment in your body. Relax. Get dairy and gluten-free. Exercise every day, but not too much. Don't drink coffee or alcohol. Don't smoke. Stay hydrated. Find a happy state of mind. Eat lots of vegetables and don't forget to eat unsaturated fat. Only complex carbohydrates are good. Visualize. Don't take Chinese herbs. Take Chinese herbs. Stay physically and mentally at peace. Turn on your "fertility switch" with our 12 week program. Only have intercourse in the missionary position as that helps the sperm swim better toward the fallopian tubes. Then keep your legs up so gravity can help. You must be hormonally optimal to conceive. Not pregnant this month, don't worry, try again next month! Register for our donor egg program just to cover all of your bases. Try our IVF program: 75 percent refund if we are unsuccessful. Probably just reading this list of advice creates angst with reading all of the unrealistic claims, suggestions, and guarantees that are on the Internet. I guess I didn't realize the (partial) list was that long.

Somewhere I read "getting pregnant should be lots of fun." You're kidding, right? What is fun about monitoring every second of you and your partner's life's activities and feelings? And, those activities are creating emotional instability. In TCM, it is commonly accepted that the seven emotions can injure the liver. In the case of dealing with fertility issues we have a number of emotions involved: worry, angst, longing, anger, grief or depression, and fear. These continuous or cyclical strong emotions are stagnating *qi*, causing Liver *qi* to rise, and may be causing kidney *qi* to scatter thereby decreasing its ability to circulate through the other channels and organs. Therefore, management of the monthly cycle of emotions is as important as managing the period and creating what I call a "warm fertile environment" in the uterus. Why is management of emotions so important? Because one of the liver's jobs is to store blood - store blood and circulate blood. If emotions stagnate its ability to do this, the uterus may not receive proper blood support. Neither will the Spirit.

In the Liver, author and acupuncturist Elisabeth Rochat says that the job is to store "actively in a way that all life may manifest. You must never consider this storing like keeping something closed up in a box. It is to be full and to be steeped in the power of the *jing* and *qi*." She uses words like "conception" and "germinating" when describing the liver's functions "as the guardian and distributor of the blood. The liver stores but also releases it." This cycle of restoration and circulation of blood may not occur when someone is in a constant state of worry (so the spleen cannot create adequate blood), longing or

depression (negatively affects the heart's functions that relate to blood), anxiety (stagnates the liver), and fear (scatters kidney *qi*).

When we are in good health, our organs are able to adapt to emotional fluctuations. But, under stress stagnation or depletion become the rule, which is not a state that allows one to create a warm, fertile environment in the uterus. Look at the emotions associated balance in the organs/elements or at least the organs that we tend to focus on with fertility patients. Start with the core: balanced kidney energy is seen as a person who is adaptable, cool, confident, serene, self-assertive and protective, and patient. Serenity - one of the key feelings that eludes many women who are working with fertility challenges. Balanced earth energy shows as maternal, supportive, nourishing, understanding, receptive, abundant. Earth equals digestion and is perhaps the most important key toward preparing the body to conceive; its energy must be properly fostered through good nutrition and digestion that works well. Balanced wood energy allows a person to be patient, flexible, accessible, optimistic, creative, growing, developing, uncomplicated, passionate.

Here we have the case of women who wish to create/develop/grow another human being, but emotions causing liver *qi* stagnation can make that more difficult. Granted, our inner states are not a one-to-one association between the state of the organ and the emotional state but, as you can see, the emotional associated with a balanced organ system may be more conducive to allowing the body to conceive and carry. And, it is never appropriate to try to relate a part of the body to only a single element. Using reductionism to explain complex energetic patterns may obscure important relationships. This is why it is important to care for what you might consider a "network" of elements or the network of emotions that often accompanies fertility challenges.

Create a warm fertile environment in the uterus by balancing the emotional state and explaining how the free flow of *qi* and blood may be negatively impacted by the cache of emotions that accompany fertility challenges. Giving your patients information about how *qi* and emotions work hand-in-hand when in balance, but do not when emotions injure *qi* is empowering. Overcoming fertility challenges is a time when women (and men) are in need of feeling that they know their own body (and its *qi* state) especially well.

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