

GUIDES/ACUPUNCTURE

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Yvonne Darnell, so-named 'The Baby Whisperer', looks at acupuncture's increasing place in the world of fertility...



There are few alternative remedies that split opinion in quite the way that acupuncture does. One of the oldest and most practised forms of traditional Chinese Medicine, it tends to provide determined schools of thought in one direction or another. One camp sidelines it as a holistic adventure without significant scientific backing, while in other quarters it brings together in complete form the complexion of systems that form a person's physiology.

It is certainly the uniting of complex physical and emotional states that brought record numbers to acupuncture last year, a good percentage of whom were looking for answers to their fertility conundrums.

For Yvonne Darnell, the Sussex-based acupuncturist, who has been widely profiled and celebrated in the national press, acupuncture's power is without question. She has already helped over 100 couples achieve their fertility dreams, intervening at a point where science had told them to turn their backs on the chances of producing a family by conventional methods.

"People ask me to define acupuncture, and the best description I can offer is that it presents a natural path down which the body can heal itself. It is a drug-free solution that is cleansing and thorough – so thorough that the practitioner's aim is to identify and treat not just the symptoms of the problem, but the cause as well."

Acupuncture's history goes back thousands of years, and it is a credit to its resilience throughout times of massive change in terms of medical and scientific advancements, that it remains as highly regarded now as ever before. Its secret of longevity may well be in its versatility.

That's because no matter what the ailment, acupuncture technique and application remains much the same, with deep principles of treating the individual as a whole.

"Acupuncture serves such a wide range, but every person who comes to see me is unique, and the treatment given will reflect this," Yvonne continues. "If several people turned up with a named condition - for example PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome), something which has become very common - the severity of it and the

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imbalances it produces will vary from person to person. The responsibility is therefore that the diagnosis and point selection will differ depending on what other underlying issues there are.

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Its flexibility works too in terms of where along the fertility timeline the woman (and indeed man) are. It is known to encompass unexplained infertility, pre-conception care and assisted conception support, plus low sperm parameters, PCOS, endometriosis, ovulation issues, menstrual cycle irregularities and recurrent miscarriage.

"Treatments, if working alongside assisted conception cycles, are recommended at certain times to support the different phases of the drugs being given. And acupuncture shouldn't be mistaken for a treatment used to assist only in getting pregnant. Its benefits last throughout the gestation period, and beyond.

"For acupuncturists, it is the pregnancy itself that dictates the level of treatment and when those treatments happen, but the benefits are vast. This delicate, beautiful time can also be plagued with discomfort and malaise which can be very frustrating. At a time when most medications can't be taken, acupuncture can bring great relief. Morning sickness, headache and threatened miscarriage are physical symptoms often supported, while emotionally, it helps with the anxiety first time mums go through at various points."

It is clear that attitudes to acupuncture have progressed over the years. Even in its very use, it has transformed from a preventative measure to something used to cure.

"We now live in a society of trying to mend things once they are broken," Yvonne continues. "I think therefore it only follows that acupuncture's role has altered over the years, but as practitioners we're keen to change those views back. We look after our cars by having them serviced regularly, giving them oil and water to keep them working, yet we seem to forget to do these key things for ourselves.

"And science has really been behind acupuncture's recent resurgence. There have been several studies undertaken and published in the British Medical journal, most of which were extremely positive.

"There are always important distinctions to be made though, because we are keen to emphasise the fact that acupuncture is often intended as a complementary benefit. Western medicine and research is invaluable and can help in cases (for example if someone has blocked, scarred fallopian tubes) that acupuncture alone cannot, but where fertility is concerned there seem to be no definitive answers.

So many people come to me diagnosed with unexplained infertility, and there must be some explanation. Acupuncture has, on many occasions, succeeded where other methods have failed, but there is a long way to go to prevent the growing fertility problems for all involved.

"But we are certainly in a good place now. I think a lot of recent interest probably comes from increasing public awareness about its benefits, either through the media or from working more closely with Western medical professionals and their understanding and acceptance. We are all nervous of the unknown, but those who try acupuncture generally feel so good they wish they had discovered it earlier."

And many acupuncturists will charge as little as £50 for an initial consultation. Naturally, prices of treatment vary according to areas and the knowledge base of the practitioner. And as with most things in life, you're likely to pay more for a specialist based on their background and experience.

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importance," Yvonne says. "After all, no matter what we do in life, we all need to feel confident in someone's ability, and be able trust them.

"This is especially the case where fertility issues are concerned as it involves discussing the most intimate part our lives. I would recommend that anyone planning treatment should contact the British Acupuncture Council to get a list of practitioners in their area. Ask what experience they have working with fertility, their success rates, how they could help with their particular problems, and what to expect from their first visit. This will give a good sense of who is right for them."

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For more information about Unity Fertility, contact Yvonne on 01444 235400 or visit www.unityfertility.co.uk