



The Sussex Stork

Acupuncturist Yvonne Darnell's success in treating infertility and pregnancy symptoms has led to her being dubbed 'the Baby Whisperer' by the national press. Jenny Mark-Bell speaks to Yvonne and two women whose lives she has changed

THE skill behind acupuncture is in the diagnosis, explains Yvonne Darnell from her clinic, Unity Fertility, in Burgess Hill. "During treatment, neurotransmitters are released to stimulate different parts of the body, with the result being that the body heals itself." The holistic Chinese therapy, which aims to treat both physical and emotional ailments as well as their underlying cause, has helped many of Yvonne's patients to conceive, often where conventional Western fertility treatment had not.

Yvonne's own fascination with the subject began on a meditation retreat: "I had been interested in medicine for a long time, but I didn't feel drawn to Western medicine. Learning about acupuncture was fascinating, and I knew it was for me," she says. Following a four year science degree course, she started practising six years ago. "I never planned to specialise until a lady came to me who was on her eighth run of IVE. I asked her at the time if she would rather see a fertility specialist but, as I had been recommended to her, we decided I would do some research and learn as

we went along. It was so exhilarating when she conceived. I did every course available and became completely absorbed in fertility work: word spread and people kept coming to me." Unity Fertility has now recorded over 100 conceptions, with 34 healthy babies born in 2010 alone: Yvonne's first patient is now a busy mother of two.

A preliminary consultation takes about an hour and a half, during which Yvonne goes through a full medical history of the patient from childhood onwards, discussing their current fertility problems as well as their work life, diet and lifestyle. Paperwork completed, Yvonne conducts a physical examination, looking at skin tone, texture and temperature, studying the tongue, and measuring pulses to ascertain the best course of treatment. "We look at emotional and physical well being to discover and treat the underlying cause of a symptom, as well as the symptom itself," she says. Stress is a major factor in problems with fertility because the adrenal glands release large amounts of the stress hormone cortisol, which impairs progesterone activity.

Yvonne is keen to underline the fact

that acupuncture is not simply a tool to boost fertility: its benefits last far beyond conception and into the pregnancy itself. "It is completely safe throughout, which of course is fantastic when you have to be careful about the medication you are ingesting, and it's very effective in alleviating horrible symptoms such as nausea and headaches," she says.

Breech babies can be turned naturally, averting the necessity of having a caesarean, and labour induced by treating anxiety, especially that experienced by first-time mothers: "That doesn't always work though," laughs Yvonne. "Some babies just want to stay put!"

Pragmatic and empirical in her approach, Yvonne points out that acupuncture complements Western medicine and can be used alongside more conventional treatment. "I have a very good relationship with local fertility clinics – I like to familiarise myself with the protocols of the different clinics in the area so that for each stage the woman goes through, we will give her the best possible care. It is an emotional journey."

www.unityfertility.co.uk



Case studies...

SARAH BOYETT

Sarah Boyett saw Yvonne while she was pregnant with her first baby Oliver, now eight months. "She was recommended to me by word of mouth, and I used to walk past her clinic in Burgess Hill. Acupuncture is incredibly relaxing, especially when you're pregnant, and I really looked forward to the sessions." When Sarah's midwife discovered that the baby was in a breech position, she made Sarah a hospital appointment for the next day. That evening Sarah went to see Yvonne, who performed a treatment called moxibustion: "The needle was on my little toe, and Yvonne burned herbs on the end, which encourages the baby to turn its head. The next day I went to my hospital appointment and they told me that the baby was no longer breech. I was so happy because I really didn't want a breech birth."



AMANDA BROUGHTON

Amanda had been trying to conceive for about a year when she went to see Yvonne: "I am 40 next year, so I had left it quite late. I decided to see someone to see if there was any fundamental reason I hadn't managed to conceive, and while I was in the surgery I picked up one of Yvonne's leaflets. I started speaking to her in September or October 2009 and had my first appointment in the November. After four sessions I fell pregnant." Baby Toby is now three months old, "and growing very quickly!". Like Sarah, Amanda decided to continue seeing Yvonne throughout her pregnancy, which helped to alleviate the general symptoms of pregnancy. "I had morning sickness for five months, and the treatment really helped. It also helped to keep my fluid levels up, and treat the sciatica I developed in the last four weeks of pregnancy." "With unexplained infertility, a lot of it is bound together with stress – I was in a stressful job, and of course the more you try to conceive, the more stressed your body becomes. After the treatments I felt calmer and more relaxed; better able to cope with everything, really. I actually went past my due date and was due to be induced hormonally, but went into labour naturally after a session with Yvonne."

