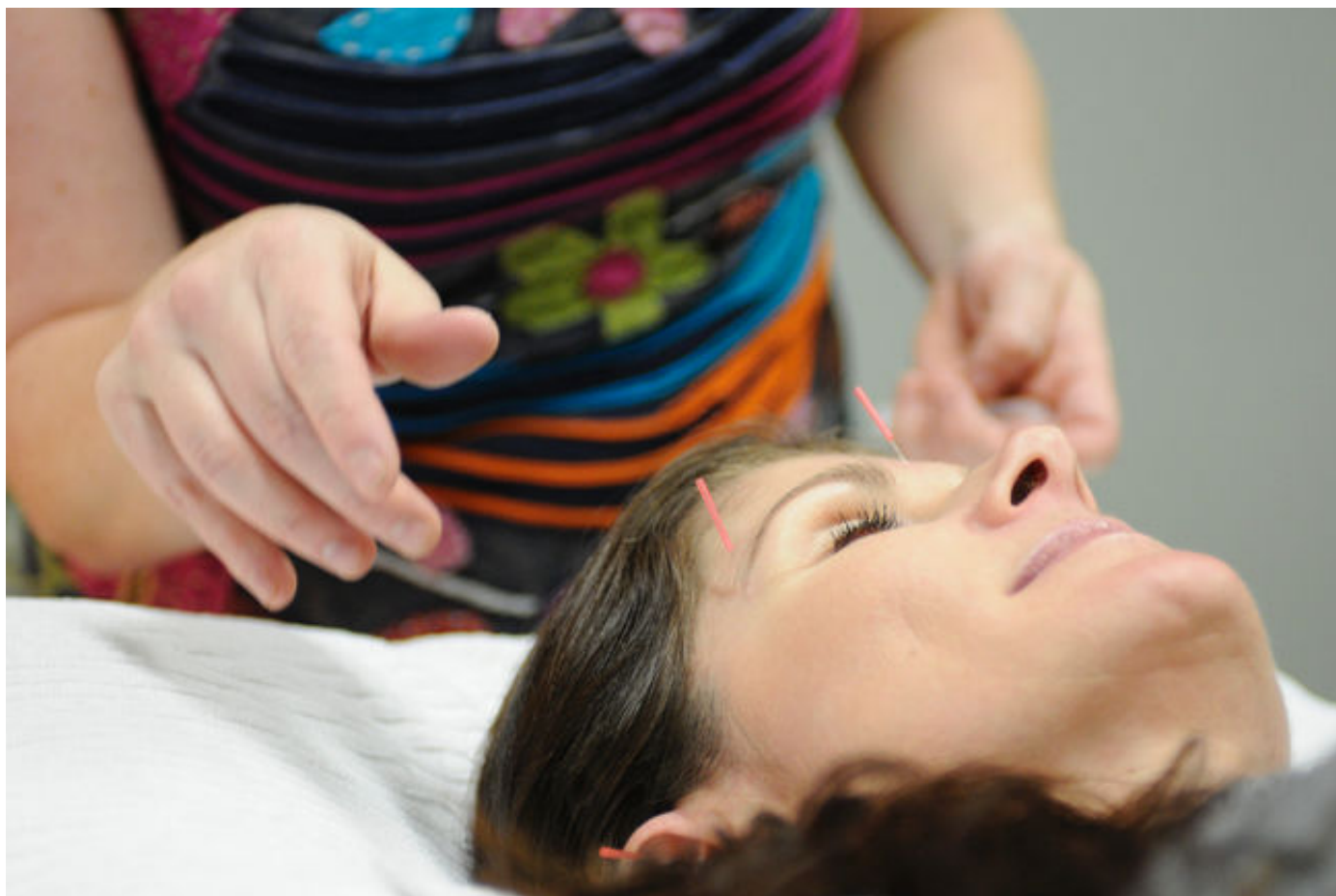

OPINION COLUMN

Many treatments available for ‘invisible condition’ of endometriosis



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
Thursday, March 6, 2014 2:25:04 PST PM



(FILE PHOTO)

Endometriosis, a condition that affects millions of women worldwide, is the focus of a global campaign linked to infertility

March is Endometriosis Awareness Month, a time to bring attention to a disease that affects approximately 176 million women worldwide, including more than 8.5 million in North America.

Endometriosis is a condition in which tissue similar to that lining the uterus is found elsewhere in the body. About 30-40% of women affected have issues with fertility, and the invisible condition can be very limiting in other ways too, causing severe pain, heavy or irregular bleeding, abdominal bloating, fatigue, and diarrhea or constipation.

Traditional Chinese medicine has a strong history of treating women's health and diseases, including endometriosis. The focus in TCM is always to find out about each woman's individual experience with an illness to determine which pattern(s) of imbalance are contributing to symptoms.

Acupuncture causes the body to release endorphins (feel good hormones — your body's natural morphine), improve circulation and relax tight muscles, amongst other things to help relieve pain from endometriosis.

Chinese herbs, such as hong hua (Flos Carthami), yi mu cao (Herba Leonuri), and yan hu suo (Rhizoma Corydalis), may be prescribed in combination with a selection of other herbs suited to each individual case. Because there is often a lot of blood loss with each menstrual cycle, blood tonics are also usually indicated, and sometimes iron and/or vitamin B12 supplementation is needed.

Hormone balancing is key with this disease though the cause of endometriosis is unknown, it's generally agreed that excess estrogen worsens the disease. Because there are six hormonal growth promoters approved for use in Canada, choose hormone-free meats.

It is also important to avoid alcohol, as it affects how estrogen is metabolized in the body. Eat plenty of fibre to help your body eliminate excess estrogens and include foods high in omega-3 essential fatty acids, such as fatty fish and flax seed oil, as they are anti-inflammatory. Other anti-inflammatory foods include turmeric, ginger, berries, apples, and beets. And, of course, eat plenty of vegetables, a rainbow selection.

Though drug therapy and surgery are conventional ways to address endometriosis, the symptoms are often either only temporarily suppressed or the diseased tissue grows back.

Many holistic physicians — like the well-known Dr. Andrew Weil, founder of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine — recommend TCM as part of a treatment plan, the idea being that there's no need to keep this illness invisible when there's so many ways to treat it.

Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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