



LIFE HEALTH

Natural methods can boost fertility



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
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Acupuncture can be used to improve chances of fertility. (Fotolia)

Deciding if and when to start a family is a huge decision. Starting earlier may make sense biologically, but many couples don't feel prepared economically, professionally, or personally until they reach their 30s or even 40s. When stress and health issues are added to the mix, fertility challenges are more likely to arise.

Infertility numbers have nearly doubled since 1992 to 16% of couples trying to conceive, according to a 2012 study from Statistics Canada.

Although there was once little that modern medicine could offer, there are now several options to choose from, including in vitro fertilization. However, even with IVF, the success rate drops after the age of 35, with a failure rate close to 90% over age 40. But there is hope.

Raj Panesar was nearly 40 when she and her husband started trying to have a family. After two ectopic pregnancies, she decided to try IVF. With a naturopath and doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, she was able to lose weight, correct some nutritional and hormonal imbalances, and at age 42 started IVF. After two tries of IVF, she became pregnant with twins.

She states, "I'm sure that it was the combination of natural medicine and Western high-tech IVF that made my dream of having a family come true."

A recent study by Dr. Lee Rubin demonstrated that IVF is more successful when combined with Whole Systems TCM, which involves a complex intervention that uses a systemic TCM assessment with treatments that can include acupuncture, Chinese herbal prescriptions, and dietary and lifestyle recommendations.

According to Dr. Rubin, "The Whole Systems TCM group was associated with 109% more live births when compared to IVF alone and 62% more live births when compared to women who just did two acupuncture sessions."

Others, like Lisa Steckler, have found success using a full TCM system treatment, even without IVF.

"I'd always had irregular periods," says Steckler, "but after a few months of acupuncture and herbs my cycles went from 80 days to 35 days. The acupuncture was also helping my stress levels and I was feeling much calmer." Seven months later, she discovered she was pregnant, and is now mom to a healthy little boy.

Other things that can help improve fertility are quitting smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, limiting alcohol consumption, and eating a Mediterranean-style diet that eliminates refined carbohydrates and includes beneficial fats.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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