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PINS & NEEDLES / CHINESE ACUPUNCTURE GIVES NEW HOPE TO COUPLES HAVING DIFFICULTY GETTING PREGNANT

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By Delia O'Hara Staff Reporter, Chicago Sun-Times

Suzanne and Dan Daley decided they wanted to have a baby five years ago. But when she went off the pill, which she had taken for 10 years, Suzanne's menstrual cycles were wildly out of whack.

"My cycles were so crazy, I didn't know if I was ovulating or not," recalls Daley, 35, an exhibit manager at a Chicago museum, who said her cycles deviated from a normal 30 days to between 40 to 90 days.

Daley talked to her doctor, who suggested she try the fertility drug Clomid.

"Because the pill had seemed to throw things off for me, I didn't want to try another pill to make it right," Daley recalls. "I wanted my overall health to be better."

In October 2002, Daley went to Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Center for Integrative Medicine, and began working with Andrea Friedman Ishikawa, a licensed acupuncture therapist. Friedman treated her with acupuncture every two weeks, plus a combination of herbs (Ishikawa is board-certified in Chinese herbology) that Daley brewed and consumed as a tea at home.

"My cycles were back to 30 days by January 2003," Daley says. By last August, Daley was pregnant, and now the North Shore woman is the proud mother of twin boys. "If something is wrong, I would rather look at the big picture, and not just go for the quick fix," she says.

Daley is one of an increasing number of Chicago area women trying the Chinese method to treating infertility, which takes a "big-picture" approach to this bewildering problem. A practitioner of the Chinese healing arts will look at a woman's tongue, which is considered a map of the body, among other indicators. Acupuncture and herbs -- and patience -- may be among the prescriptions, along with a change of diet and an increase or change in exercise.

"Fertility is the natural expression of a healthy body," says Randine Lewis, author of a new book about traditional Chinese medicine (or TCM), *The Infertility Cure: The Ancient Chinese Wellness Program for Getting Pregnant and Having Healthy Babies* (Little, Brown, \$25.95). Chinese medical practices aim to restore the body's balance when it has been disrupted by poor diet, stress or other causes. "Qi" (pronounced "chee"), or energy, is "the basis of all traditional Chinese medicine ... the force that enlivens every cell," Lewis writes.

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Acupuncture, a system in which slender metal needles are inserted into critical points along "meridians" or lines of energy that run throughout the body, is believed to balance the body by removing blockages to the free flow of qi. Herbal treatments are concocted to address any underlying pattern of imbalance that is diagnosed by a practitioner. In addition to examining a woman's tongue, a practitioner will also look at a patient's face, take her pulse at different places in her body and ask numerous health-related questions.

"There is working the root and working the branch. The root is the underlying cause of the problem," says Mary Pat Finley, an acupuncturist who works out of Partners in Wellness in Lincoln Park. Like most TCM practitioners, Finley, who became interested in Eastern medicine when she lived in Japan, prefers to work the root.

However, this approach takes time, one thing women with ticking biological clocks don't have much of.

"Most of my clients come to me after having gone to fertility clinics. Acupuncture can be incredibly effective, but it does require a little bit of a leap of faith. You have to take the time off from ART assisted reproductive technology to get results. It's hard for some couples to take a break and just do acupuncture," says Finley.

Age is a big factor, Finley says. She claims a 60 percent to 65 percent success rate with women under 35, but just a 5 percent success rate with women in their mid-40s.

Finley and other TCM practitioners often work in tandem with Western fertility specialists, who may have been impressed by studies like a German one cited in the April 2002 issue of *Fertility and Sterility*, the publication of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine. It said that women who had received acupuncture treatments 25 minutes before and after in vitro fertilization had a substantially better success rate (42.5 percent) than a similar group of women who had done IVF without acupuncture (26.3 percent).

Those results caught the attention even of the writers of the HBO series "Sex and the City." Last year, Kristin Davis' character, Charlotte, tried acupuncture as part of her infertility treatments.

Dr. Brian Kaplan, a reproductive endocrinologist at Fertility Centers of Illinois, suggested his patients Jennifer and Brian Gibbs consult with Finley after they had suffered through two failed IVFs, says Jennifer Gibbs. In conjunction with acupuncture, the third try worked. The couple is thrilled to be expecting a baby this fall.

"Acupuncture definitely made me more relaxed and more centered with the whole process," Jennifer Gibbs says.

"I don't believe Chinese medicine by itself will resolve fertility problems, but it might benefit the outcome as a complement to Western medical technology," Kaplan says. "Acupuncture may provide some benefit from a psychological point of view. Theoretically it improves the blood flow to the ovaries, and that could only help the response to the fertility drugs. We know that

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increased blood flow to the uterus will improve implantation. I have seen patients who have done well on acupuncture." Still, Kaplan says the Chinese therapy is less likely to help older women trying to have a child. That's because they have "a fragility of the chromosomes of the eggs. Acupuncture won't change the DNA, the genetics of the eggs." He says he would not want to see a woman "go do non-traditional medicine at 38, delaying Western infertility treatments, and then walk into my office at 41 wanting to do in vitro fertilization. That would be to her detriment. The age of a woman is a critical variable."

Sheng-Li Wang, a TCM practitioner who trained in China, agrees that the two systems work well together. "That's why people come here, that's why doctors refer them. People get good results with both types of medicine."

Wang, who in his 11 years practicing in Chicago has consistently seen "95 percent non-Chinese clients" at his Dragon's Life clinics in Ravenswood and Downers Grove, offers acupuncture; Chinese herbs; Tui na, a manipulative system somewhat like chiropractic adjustments; Qi gong, a breathing technique; and other treatments. Wang charges about \$60 per session and addresses conditions that range from asthma to eczema to cancer. With infertility, he claims about a 60 percent success rate with women ages 35 to 43.

"'We are what we eat' is a cliché for a reason: It's true. Foods are medicinal as well," says Ania Grimone, one of the acupuncturists on staff at Northwestern Memorial Hospital's seven-year-old Center for Integrative Medicine, where an initial consultation is \$120, with follow-up visits costing \$90.

"Stress is a huge factor. We maintain open lines of communication with our patients' reproductive endocrinologists or ob/gyns, so everyone is on the same page." She adds that the center never prescribes Chinese herb treatments if Western drugs are being used, to avoid unwanted drug interactions.

Chicago has two accredited schools of traditional Chinese medicine -- a relatively new branch of the San Diego-based Pacific College of Oriental Medicine and the 25-year-old Midwest College of Oriental Medicine.

Ishikawa, who treated Suzanne Daley, now practices at the Healing Spring Acupuncture Center in Glenview, where the cost of an hourlong treatment is \$70. She and her partner, Mitzi Labant, a graduate of the first class, in 1979, of the Midwest College (then Center) of Oriental Medicine, remember a time when acupuncturists could be -- and sometimes were -- arrested for practicing medicine without a license. Acupuncturists have been licensed in Illinois for just five years, but the public has embraced their craft in growing numbers.

"It's catching fire," Ishikawa says. "People are yearning in this toxic world we live in to go back to a more natural and holistic way."

This summer, Ishikawa has been giving acupuncture treatments to Laura Eisenberg Jachim, 42, a Deerfield massage therapist who is hoping to get pregnant. Jachim's own work is informed by the Eastern healing arts and she trusts them, she says. She and her husband, Keith, suffered a miscarriage two years ago, and they have a deadline in mind for getting pregnant again. "If I'm not pregnant by then, we're going to start to explore alternatives, which other people would consider the mainstream" -- such as Western fertility treatments, Jachim says.

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She's hoping it won't come to that. "I think that my body has the wisdom to know what to do. I think it needs some support, and acupuncture is a great way to get that support," Jachim says.

Says Labant: "Acupuncture helps to empower a person. We're talking about wellness here, and there are things you can do to stay well. The treatments open up the flow, get the energy moving. You have to make room for a baby to come into your life."

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