

Traditional Chinese Medicine & Women's Health Care

BY DORIS RATHGEBER

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a well established practice for maternity care. Reproductive health in women depends primarily on the energetic function of the kidneys, liver, and spleen. However, in TCM, these organs differ in energetic function than their anatomical function in western medicine.



In TCM, the Kidney energy aspect is the foundation for all other organs. The Kidney stores our “Essence” (Jing), which is taken from our parents and established at conception. The Kidney governs growth, development, and reproduction. The Liver stores blood, moves blood during menstruation, regulates the flow of Qi (life force) and helps a person to keep a balanced emotional state. The Spleen, which is the main digestive organ in Chinese medicine, produces Qi (energy) from the food we eat, which ensures that blood flows within its normal pathways.

An imbalance in the functioning of these organs can lead to reproductive disorders in women and discomfort during pregnancy and birth. It is a good idea for women planning to become pregnant to address any current irregularities in menstruation before conceiving, as doing so may help avoid discomforts during pregnancy.

Once a woman is pregnant, her physiology shifts. Menstruation stops, causing Qi and blood to accumulate in the uterus. As a result, the Spleen is under greater demand to produce and supply blood and Qi to aid in a healthy pregnancy. The Kidney lends its Yin and Essence to the development of the fetus, and the Liver blood nourishes the uterus.

Heat in the body becomes common as the pregnancy progresses. The reason for this is that the uterus becomes bigger and causes unavoidable stagnation of Qi and blood. There is also less Yin and blood available for the rest of the body, causing a relative excess of Yang. This also manifests as symptoms of heat. Stagnation of Qi and blood may cause symptoms such as pain, numbness, swelling, reflux, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, or constipation.

Beside herbal medicine, acupuncture is a widely accepted practice in maternity care. Pregnant women often look for help to treat conditions such as nausea, morning sickness, swollen ankles, constipation, and back pain. Acupuncture, which is also used to relieve pain during labor and delivery, should start six weeks before the due date. If the baby is in the wrong position, acupuncture can help to turn the baby, providing the treatments start before the 30th week.

There is much more information on the topic of TCM and pregnancy. As with all forms of medical care during pregnancy, it is important to that you check with your gynecologist to determine what is best for you and your baby. ✍

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