

TCM and the Treatment of Infertility

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The treatment of infertility using Western Medicine differs in many ways and uses completely different approaches from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

The treatment of infertility using TCM methods is based on the basic theories of TCM and is non-invasive. Treatment methods include herbal medicine, acupuncture and the use of relaxation techniques such as Qi Gong and Tai Ji Quan. It also often demands a change in lifestyle and diet. In the case of herbal medicine, the patient will take the medicine twice daily, usually for several months. Besides being reminded to live a healthy life, the patient will be instructed to return to the clinic to adjust the medicinal blend weekly or at least twice per month. Additionally, there will be a regular blood and sperm analysis and cycle monitoring via ultrasound.

The western approach of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is much more complicated and is invasive. The IVF specialist will prescribe different types of Western Medicine (mostly hormones), which have to be taken on a rigid schedule in preparation for surgical procedures. This treatment lasts four to six weeks and relies on the knowledge and cooperation of a team of medical professionals consisting of nurses, radiologists and embryologists, who will monitor the process of fertilization and the ripening of the embryo. The patient has to be monitored carefully to prevent any harmful side effects.

TCM understands the functions of the female reproductive system, including organs, glands and the female psyche as functions of the whole organic system. Functions include the kidney, heart and uterus systems.

The kidney-jing (essence) represents the follicle and sperm. The kidney's Yin and Yang function influences the hormones, which regulate the different phases of the female cycle. The heart hosts the spirit and with it, the activities of hypothalamus and hypophysis, which control the entire female cycle and the output of hormones. The uterus is the place where reproduction happens in the female body.

The spleen and liver systems are not as directly involved in the reproductive process as the kidney, the heart and the uterus, but they are very important for overall wellbeing. The spleen (representing the digestive system) produces



blood and the liver stores it. The liver controls the output of blood for regular menstruation and regulates the smooth flow of Qi in the whole body.

Infertility diagnoses in Western Medicine are mostly defined in the following terms: Endometriosis, ovarian dysfunction, pelvic infection, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, ovarian tube blockage or sperm abnormality. Once the diagnosis is clear, decisions about the treatment are made, including determination if the infertility is not treatable. After diagnosis, hormonal treatments begin and IVF or ICSI treatments will follow.

In TCM, diagnosis is very different. According to the basic theory of TCM, doctors will perform a TCM diagnosis by pulse diagnosis and by examining the tongue. For example, diagnosis might be: liver stagnation, deficient kidney yang, cold humidity stagnation in the spleen system, and/or blocked meridians.

It is important that the success of both medical systems depends on an open and trusting doctor-patient relationship. The doctor is dependent on the patient to do her "homework" - observing the details of her cycle, taking her Basic Body Temperature (BBT), and taking her prescribed medicine regularly. Keeping regular doctor appointments is vitally necessary to guarantee the success of the treatment.

Does TCM treatment help couples who need to undergo IVF or Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) treatments? The answer is...Yes! To help prepare for IVF or ICSI treatments, herbal medicine can be very helpful in improving sperm quality, follicle quality, endometrial thickness, fertile quality of discharge during ovulation and overall relaxation. Treatment should start at least one month before the IVF appointment. ✍

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