

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Can acupuncture help pregnancy?

Associate Professor Caroline Smith from the Centre for Complementary Medicine is researching the effects of acupuncture on assisted reproduction - fertility medicine. She is collaborating with researchers from IVF Australia and the Acupuncture IVF Support Clinic, NSW. This research is funded by the National Institute of Complementary Medicine through the Department of Health and Ageing.

'In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is becoming a widely practiced and accepted treatment for infertility across Australia,' says Associate Professor Smith. 'In 2006, there were 53,543 assisted reproduction procedures (such as IVF) resulting in 9,277 births. Assisted reproductive technologies have progressed significantly over the past 20 years with IVF in Australia having some of the best success rates in the world. However, where the embryo fails to implant in the uterus this can have severe emotional and financial consequences for the family. Acupuncture is known to reduce stress and anxiety and has recently been studied for the benefits it gives to women undergoing IVF treatments. This research will focus on providing a clearer picture of the data currently available, and an understanding of if and how acupuncture may affect a women's chances of becoming pregnant using acupuncture with IVF treatments.'

Two separate studies will be conducted by the research team. The first will examine the outcomes of acupuncture treatments for women receiving IVF (or other forms of assisted fertility treatments). Clinical outcomes will be examined for those women, combining both acupuncture and IVF. The aim is to establish a stronger link between the use of acupuncture and pregnancy outcomes. The second study will focus on whether receiving acupuncture on the day of embryo transfer can increase a woman's chances of implantation. A sample of 20 women, recruited through an IVF clinic, will provide two blood samples – one the day



before and one the day after the embryo transfer. The blood will be analysed to determine if there is evidence of immune modulation (an adjustment of the immune system) and how this correlates to their acupuncture treatments and IVF treatment outcomes.

While the success rate of IVF is improving, this research will increase our knowledge about acupuncture and its effectiveness on reproductive health outcomes, providing emotional and potentially clinical benefits to Australian families.

Project Title: Acupuncture and reproductive health outcomes: building evidence in an integrated care setting.

Funding has been set at: \$30,000

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