

Channel 4 Extra: Acupuncture For Infertility

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The following Action News Extra report by medical editor Marilyn Brooks first aired Feb. 14, 2005, on Channel 4 Action News at 5 p.m.

Many women trying to conceive often turn to infertility treatments, and top-notch infertility clinics such as the Jones Institute at Allegheny General Hospital are finding that, for some infertile couples, this ancient therapy is what they need.

It may be centuries old, but acupuncture is proving an honorable and worthy modern-day treatment alternative for all kinds of conditions, including back pain, headaches and depression.

What about infertility? Is that possible? Amy Adams can only hope.

Adams: "I'm hoping this can relax myself. If it doesn't work, it's still going to help me because I'm much more relaxed, much less stress."

Stress is a major factor in infertility. Adams, an admitted Type-A worrier, has spent five years trying to get pregnant and tried almost everything. Adams: "Clomid, all the different fertility medications. Had all kinds of different problems. Allergic reactions to some of them. Injections every day."

The neat thing about acupuncture is that there are no harmful side effects and no associated risks to it. You don't have to worry about multiple pregnancies, you don't have to worry about ectopic pregnancies, and according to the patients who've tried it, you get a whole lot more than just relaxation.

Frank Velasquez, a new father, says acupuncture helped by bringing his body into balance. Velasquez: "I found I had more energy. I wake up earlier in the day. Obviously, it improved the quality of my sperm."

His wife also had acupuncture, and in vitro fertilization. It didn't work the first time, but when he started acupuncture, they tried again. That was the charmer. Carrie Velasquez, wife: "You don't believe it at first. Even at eight weeks, when I went back to the reproductive doctor, I said, 'I don't believe you.' And she said, 'Well, I think you should start believing me. I think you're really going to have this baby.'"

Frank, a strength and conditioning coach for the Pittsburgh Pirates, was in Florida for spring training when Carrie called. Frank Velasquez: "She told me we're pregnant. I was in the car getting ready to go somewhere and I just sat there for a while."

Like any medical procedure, it begins with questions and history. Needles are then placed in specific patterns unique to each patient. It has been done this way since before 200 B.C.

Jennifer Whiteside, licensed acupuncturist: "I'll have to gear my treatment towards not only what is going on in their body but what the doctors are trying to do with them. We're affecting the whole system, the hormones, the neurotransmitters. People have an opioid release."

Unable to tolerate fertility drugs, Adams hopes this ancient art can unlock the door to her infertility and make her five-year dream come true.

This is a relatively new trend, probably in the last three to seven years. It seems women who have pain with their periods get rid of the pain, their periods regulate and things happen.

Placement of the needles varies, based on the patient's infertility problem. Few acupuncturists have studied infertility, so experts say you should look for someone who has. Find out where they trained, and if they're also trained in western medicine.

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