

## Does Acupuncture Improve Pregnancy Rates in IVF?

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A clinical study soon to be published (2010) in *Fertility and Sterility* (Randomized controlled trial: effects of acupuncture on pregnancy rates in women undergoing in vitro fertilization) by a respected group of investigators at Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, Illinois, casts doubt on the benefit of performing acupuncture in IVF patients. Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese therapy based on restoring energy flow by stimulating specific points on the skin. It has been claimed to be helpful in a variety of gynecologic conditions, including infertility.

Prior published studies investigating acupuncture in IVF has given mixed results; some do show benefit but others show no improvement in the chance of having a baby through IVF. The authors from Chicago performed a well-designed randomized study using acupuncture in 160 women undergoing IVF. Acupuncture occurred just before and after embryo transfer. This study included both a treated or "true" group (who got the acupuncture therapy performed correctly by traditional Chinese standards) and a "sham group" (who had needles inserted in non-standard locations on the skin).

The results showed the clinical pregnancy rate was **45.3%** in the **true arm** and **52.7%** in the **sham arm**, however, the higher pregnancy rate in the sham arm was not statistically higher. There were no serious adverse effects from the treatment.

This study adds to our knowledge regarding the role of acupuncture in IVF patients. Acupuncture remains an alternative or complementary therapy in common use despite the fact that there is no consensus in the medical community over its effectiveness. Given the widely varying clinical study results regarding acupuncture over the last decade, acupuncture remains in the realm of the unknown, not unlike much of modern medical treatment. Given its apparent safety, there seems to be little downside, except for the costs and time involved, as long as one accepts that evidence supporting its benefit continues to be weak.

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