

BEING FERTILE

10 Steps to Help You Overcome the
Struggles of Infertility, Get Pregnant,
and Create a Happy, Healthy Family



DR. SPENCE PENTLAND
FOREWORD BY DR. JEFFREY ROBERTS

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“This book is dedicated to my family.

Words cannot describe how much I love you all.”

~Spence

How to Use This Book

1. Do not simply read through the pages of this book - study it, consume it, absorb it. Write in the columns and blank pages, highlight, underline, star, dog ear, and flag pages that are important to you. Treat this book like it is something you are going to have to teach to others when you are done.
2. Be sure to complete the exercises at the end of each step. These will serve you as a guide for moving forward on your journey toward family. Ink it, don't just think it. Then re-write in a separate journal and share your plan with someone who can help hold you accountable.
3. Review weekly. Document actions taken and rate your progress and accomplishments. Do this for at least 3 months, 6 to 12 being ideal. Revisit the pages of the book when you feel necessary and revise your plan where needed.
4. Finally, pay it forward. When your time with this book is complete, gift it to someone else in need or donate it to your local women's centre or library.

I wish you all the best with creating your family.



~Spence

Foreword

As Reproductive Endocrinologists, many aspects of the care we provide patients in achieving pregnancy are not based in strong scientific evidence. We are faced with a variety of clinical situations that simply merit common sense and a conservative approach. Modern fertility treatments like in vitro fertilization (IVF) are increasingly more effective, but as artificial methods of conception, they expose mother and child to a number of risks during and after pregnancy. Proudly we now have the ability to provide the vast majority of our patients with a successful pregnancy, but not without exposing them to hazards inherent in the treatments. Given this, we must be clear on the diagnosis and supportive of any Complementary or Alternative Medicine (CAM) treatment that can provide for a natural conception or improvement in the effectiveness of our treatment.

The scientific evidence for the use of many CAM treatments are mixed at best, with most focus placed on the use of acupuncture. Many aspects of these treatments and interventions do not lend themselves to scientific methods of study, so will likely never be validated. However, I believe that certain CAM therapies, such as acupuncture, can be helpful in the management of infertility. The level of stress that our patients undergo during their struggles with infertility is commonly overlooked. It is estimated that 12% of infertile women are clinically depressed (Peterson, 2014), and up to 23% have generalized anxiety disorder (Chen, 2004). Using psychological measures of mental health, infertility has been shown to generate similar levels of stress as major cancer (Domar, 1993). Not unexpectedly, this stress also results in more long-term marital discourse and divorce (Gameriro, 2011). In terms of IVF and other advanced treatments, we do our best to reduce anxiety levels by making ourselves available to patients and streamlining the process to minimize any disruption to daily lives, however, the treatment can be very stressful for some. Treatment outcomes with IVF may be lower when stress levels are high (Quant, 2013), so any intervention that helps relax our patients (i.e., acupuncture) will certainly be of benefit. At the very least, the delicate medical procedures required for IVF will be easier to perform on a patient that is less stressed or “in her zone”.

Many of our patients find value in yoga, meditation and exercise during fertility treatment and throughout pregnancy. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners help our patients by providing not just acupuncture, but also a variety of life-style modifications that assist with weight loss and stress relief. Optimizing one’s health is important for success with both natural conception and fertility treatments. To optimize outcomes with fertility treatments and pregnancy outcome, the physicians at Pacific Centre for Reproductive Medicine (PCRM) advocate a healthy lifestyle. This includes the use of dietary supplements, a healthy balanced diet, maintenance of a normal body weight and physical activity.

Dr. Pentland is a pioneer in the field of reproductive care and one of a few that delivers his care with knowledge of both TCM and assisted reproductive technologies. He also faces the challenges of infertility with a scientific mind and has always supported research and academics at PCRM. He works tirelessly for his patients and makes himself available for all aspects of care, whether medical or emotional. Yinstill has been a pleasure to work with and their approach on all levels has been highly ethical and unobtrusive. Over the years, our practices have slowly

integrated and are now at a point where patients can seamlessly experience the benefits of both therapies. In 2011, Dr. Pentland established the IVF Acupuncture group at PCRMC to make CAM more accessible to our patients, and are currently publishing our successes with this unique collaborative model for the management of infertility. For the integration of general fertility care, little correspondence between us is required as we have become more comfortable with each other's approach. I have had the pleasure of working closely with Dr. Pentland for almost a decade. Together we have helped hundreds of women and couples to experience the magic of children. As parents ourselves, we can think of no feeling comparable in this world, and given what we do for a living, a gift that we will never take for granted.

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“When we’re willing to listen to our bodies and begin trusting ourselves as much as we trust outer authorities, all the rules change. And so does our biology. Statistics no longer apply to us. We enter the realm of miracles and undreamed-of possibilities.” ~Dr. Christiane Northrup, author of Women’s Bodies, Women’s Wisdom

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Prologue

I have learned so much over the past 10 years treating women and couples that are trying to start or expand on their families and I am eager and excited to share these experiences in this book.

Within the clinical setting, every consultation with each woman or couple is a breeding ground for deeply individualized recommendations to improve health and fertility. It is an intimate process of connection and trust, woven together with the nuances of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

I hope the pages that follow capture some of that connection, speak to you, inspire hope and give you a clear glimpse into the tools that can be used to change the trajectory of your life, and possibly help you in creating your own happy healthy family.

Not unlike the fundamentals of TCM, I believe that the cultivation of fertility is not a complicated journey, yet understandably, can seem profound when searching for *your own personal* solution. There are no magic bullets, no shortcuts and very few quick fixes. I decided to keep this book as straightforward as possible with 10 chapters representing the 10 steps that I explore at great depth with each woman or couple that come to my clinic. Taking the time to really care for yourself, accepting your circumstances and having faith that you will reach your goal through perseverance is the basis for success when faced with the difficulties of starting a family.

What really makes myself and the other doctors at our clinic, Yinstill Reproductive Wellness, stand apart is our integration and collaboration with Vancouver's largest IVF centres. These relationships over the years have deepened my understanding of what the women I see are going through, and how to better support them on their journey.

I am very proud to be part of the team of professionals at Yinstill. We are all dedicated to raising the bar in the field of complementary and alternative reproductive medicine. I encourage you to take some time to read the many testimonials on our website (yinstill.com) from the women and couples we have worked with over the years, as their stories in their words may help you understand the work that is being done and how it could help you.

I want to thank you for deciding to read this book. It demonstrates the dedication you have toward creating your family. The struggles you may be going through can be extremely difficult and your perseverance and strength is honorable. I urge you to keep doing everything in your power to stay the course and maintain faith that your dreams will come true.

Biography

A bit about me...

My name is Spence Pentland and my mission is to optimize the health of my clients and increase their chances of conception in order to build happy families because to me, nothing is more important than family.

I am a licenced Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine (<http://ctcma.bc.ca>), a Fellow of the American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine (<http://aborm.org>), and a member of the Canadian Association of Oriental Obstetrical Medicine (<http://caoom.org>).

Since 2004, my clinical practice in Vancouver, British Columbia has focused exclusively on the treatment of men's and women's reproductive health, specifically fertility and its related conditions including polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis, and recurrent pregnancy loss (RPL). We support women and couples going through In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) with the goals of increasing pregnancy rates and reducing stress along the journey. Lastly, we care for women throughout their pregnancies, helping prevent miscarriage, alleviating common complaints, and preparing them for labour and delivery.

After pursuing undergraduate studies in botany, herbal medicine, horticulture, psychology and philosophy, I went on to graduate with my doctor of TCM (Dr. TCM) from the acclaimed International College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Vancouver before completing my internship at Anhui Hospital of TCM in Hefei City, China. In 2008, I obtained certification with the American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine (ABORM).

I am the founder of The IVF Acupuncture Group of Greater Vancouver, operating 7 days a week for on-site embryo transfer day acupuncture treatments. I am also a member of IAAC (Infertility Awareness Association), CFAS (Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society), and ASRM (American Society for Reproductive Medicine).

In collaboration with Dr. Jeff Roberts of the Pacific Centre for Reproductive Medicine (PCRM), I am completing clinical research on the stress-reducing effects of acupuncture when used in conjunction with IVF. This is currently in the process of being accepted for presentation at the Pacific Coast Reproductive Society (PCRS) annual general meeting in California.

The environment and its impact on our health is a passion of mine. My family and our company donate regularly to The David Suzuki Foundation, The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), Vancouver Farmer's Markets, and Health Action Network Society (HANS). We also plant a tree for every baby our clinic plays a role in bringing into this world, every baby who doesn't make it into the world, and for everyone that helps Yinstill grow. We call this 'The Yinstill Gratitude Forest'. Locally, we give to an organization that supports pregnant women and new mothers who need a helping hand. Internationally, we are proud to support Shanti Uganda, a birthing centre in Africa that helps prevent hundreds of mother and baby birth-related deaths each year.

As the former president of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Association of British Columbia and the provincial TCM quality assurance committee, I remain active in educating healthcare colleagues and the public on the powerful benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and acupuncture, working steadily on the integration of ancient Daoist wisdom into modern western life as a way to build awareness about reproductive health.

When not helping others start their families, I can be found spending time with my beautiful wife, Chantal, and my two amazing sons. After getting married and having my two boys, Salix and Ari, I was gifted with an intimate understanding of what each and every client that comes through the clinic door is in search of and I desperately want each and every woman and couple to have the chance to be graced with the heart-opening love that children bring.

I absolutely love working with people trying to start or expand their family. When someone I've been working with tells me a baby is on the way, the feeling I get is hard to put into words, but it confirms for me that I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.

Introduction

If you were baking a cake for someone you loved on a special occasion, you would take great care to follow the recipe, right? You would preheat the oven and use the best quality ingredients, you would stir and whip and measure with the utmost of care before baking it at just the right temperature and watching it mindfully. And the results would be magnificent and worth the effort.

But that's just a cake...

The subject of this book is how to create the most precious thing of all--a human life, so I trust you will want to heed an even greater regard for the recipe at hand. I have included 10 steps, each one as important as the next. I cannot guarantee with absolute certainty that you will reach your goal. My experience has shown me time and again that these steps will greatly improve your chances. If you follow them, you will improve your physical and emotional health and provide the best possible environment for your unborn child.

It is a great privilege for me to share my knowledge with you as we embark on the most important and rewarding journey of your life. I wish you happy and healthy children and to know the joys of being a parent in whatever way that comes to you.

Let's get started, shall we?

Step One

Ancient Healing: An overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine

A mediocre doctor treats disease, a good doctor prevents disease and a master doctor teaches his community to be well. ~Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen

Since this is a book based in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and I am a doctor of TCM, I think an overview of its basic philosophy and ideas is a good place to start.

With explanations of the fundamental principles including patterns and their symptoms, treatment of these patterns through acupuncture and herbs and accompanying case studies, I aim to give you an understanding of what it is that I do and how it can help you achieve your dream of having a baby.

One of the key components of TCM that differentiates it from western medicine is that the body, mind and spirit are not separate from each other. Your emotions, sleep patterns, stress levels, relationships, job satisfaction and personal fulfillment for example, are all connected to your health and your ability to conceive a child. TCM looks at you as a whole individual, diagnosing your patterns of disharmony and treating you accordingly. You will never leave the office of a doctor of TCM with a diagnosis of ‘unexplained infertility’. There is an explanation for your reproductive challenges and I am fully invested in helping you discover what that is and overcoming it.

There is never a wrong time to begin to utilize the powers of TCM to aid in your fertility journey. When women and couples come to see me, they are at one of three places; **1.** they want to optimize their chances of natural conception before any type of western medical intervention, **2.** they want support while going through western medical assisted reproductive technologies, or **3.** they have exhausted all western medical options and have turned to TCM as their last hope.

TCM is very much a partnership. Rather than *telling* you what is happening within *your* body, I will guide you through self-monitoring so that we can co-develop a plan that is tailored to you and addresses all areas of wellness - not only the symptom of infertility. The human body is highly intelligent and will tell you everything you need to know if you listen carefully.

The four ancient pillars of TCM pattern diagnosis are looking, listening/smelling, questioning and palpation (touch). By utilizing these simple and trusted techniques, an accurate foundation for diagnosis is identified so that specific acupuncture points, custom herbal formulations and individual lifestyle recommendations can be made.

Maintaining and restoring balance is at the heart of diagnosis and treatment in TCM and there are two primary tools used to do this: acupuncture and herbal medicine. While they are intricate and take years to master, the basic ideology is that acupuncture opens and herbal medicine heals.

What IS Acupuncture and Herbal Medicine?

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is based on the premise that we have energy meridians running through our bodies which gives power to our nervous system and provides our organic physical being with fundamental life force. When this energy or 'Qi' (pronounced 'chee') is blocked or not flowing smoothly, it causes a variety of problems including infertility. Using a series of very tiny needles at key points throughout your body restores the flow of energy and aids the body in returning to its natural state of perfect health.

Acupuncture is not a drug, nor does it override physiology; instead, it promotes the body's regular circulation and rhythms so that it can function unimpeded. Your body's innate desire is to be balanced and healthy. Acupuncture gives it a helping hand. Like stitches for a deep cut, acupuncture addresses deep programming and allows the body to do what it was designed to do: be well. While it's not the actual healer, it creates an optimal environment for the body to do its own healing, not unlike stitches.

Benefits of Acupuncture

- Optimizes natural fertility potential by correcting conditions that may be contributing to difficulties with conception. It is also utilized by those who are proactive and simply want to be at their pinnacle of health before conceiving and carrying a pregnancy.
- Improves pregnancy and live birth rates, as well as reducing miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy rates when used in conjunction with In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). There is a burgeoning body of research to support this. Refer to Step Nine for a more extensive discussion and references regarding TCM and how it helps improve IVF success.
- Improves blood circulation to the reproductive organs and thickens the uterine lining (for more things that you can do at home to enhance blood flow to the reproductive organs, see Step Eight). Blood delivers nutrition and oxygen to every cell, as well as carrying away waste. In the case of IVF, the possibility of enhanced delivery of IVF medications to the developing eggs via optimized blood flow is a well-accepted theory.
- Reduces stress and anxiety. Besides the effect acupuncture has on improving blood flow to the reproductive organs, this is likely the most accepted reason the Reproductive Endocrinologists (fertility & IVF doctors) send their patients to me. Its effect on reducing the tone or excitability of the sympathetic nervous system is well documented, reported by patients and observed time and time again in the clinical setting. This change in the nervous system further increases blood flow to the reproductive organs.
- Helps restore hormonal balance involved in all aspects of reproductive and whole body functioning (i.e. thyroid, insulin, estrogen, FSH-follicle stimulating hormone, progesterone, testosterone, adrenal).

- Regulates the menstrual cycle and induces regular ovulation by balancing hormones, helping with weight loss and removing emotional blockages (such as in women struggling with PCOS).
- Regulates immune function required for implantation and preventing miscarriage. The body's delicate wisdom needs to be given the space to function as needed here. Too much or too little immune response may result in repeated implantation failure. If you suffer from allergies or atopic conditions like asthma, eczema, sinusitis or recurrent early pregnancy loss, then immune regulation should be an important health goal.
- Supports women suffering from recurrent pregnancy loss (RPL) on an emotional level. TCM can help reduce the fear of trying to conceive or being pregnant and boost the will power necessary to once again move forward. It may also help mend the broken heart that accompanies these losses.
- Reduces pain and inflammation in conditions such as Vulvodynia (pelvic pain) and Endometriosis.
- Can improve sperm quality such as motility, count, morphology, and possibly DNA fragmentation rates (see Step Ten for more information on the treatment of male factor infertility).
- Enhances sexual function and desire, which so often becomes major obstacles after trying to conceive for a period of time.
- Eases the discomforts of pregnancy. Reduction of nausea, aches and pains, hypertension, headaches and many other symptoms observed in the clinic. The management of gestational diabetes, turning breech babies, and preparing the woman and the cervix for labour are also common applications.

Chinese Herbal Medicine

Using plants to heal the body is nothing new. While to some they are considered an alternative, in fact, plants are the original ingredients of westernized medicine as we know it today. Without the extraction and isolation of one single component of the plant, or the addition of synthetics and fillers, herbs are just medicine in its unadulterated state. They can be used in conjunction with acupuncture or on their own. Sometimes they will be in capsules or tablets, but often they will be prescribed in teas to maximize potency. They may be foul-tasting to the unaccustomed palate but tantalizing the taste buds is not the goal. There may be a little pain but there is much to gain!

Benefits of Chinese Herbal Medicine

- Aids a dietary cleanse, digestion, appetite control, and weight management.
- Gently encourages the body's systems to move toward balance and optimal functioning.
- Increases blood circulation and helps remove blockages such as blood clots and cysts.
- Soothes emotions, sedates mental activity and reduces stress. Particularly effective in the premenstrual phase.
- Balances body fluid metabolism, helping reduce the retention of water and enhance elimination of waste.
- Boosts resistance to viral and bacterial attacks and helps reduce inflammation via immune system regulation.

- Warms the body if too cold; cools the body if too warm.
- Regulates the bowels and urinary function, optimizing the elimination of waste.
- Improves sleep conditions such as trouble falling asleep, light sleep, night sweats and waking early with difficulty going back to sleep.
- Helps in the management of painful conditions such as Endometriosis.
- Supplements deficiencies of vital energy and nourishes blood production.
- Helps stop unwanted bleeding as is the case with fibroids, polyps or the flooding that may occur as a result of hormonal shifting toward the end of a woman's reproductive years.
- Regulates the menstrual cycle including ovulation and PMS via the restoration of hormonal balance.
- Is traditionally used to 'secure fetus' and reduce the incidence of miscarriage.
- Improves sperm parameters most notably by reducing the TCM pattern of Heat* (sperm's #1 enemy) that so many men present with.
- Increases libido (both male and female) and helps manage erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation.

** While there may be parallels between TCM terminology and western medical conditions (i.e., Heat=inflammation), direct correlations aren't always the case and it's best to seek a professional opinion.*

Wondering what it will cost?

The average cost of a private acupuncture treatment in North America ranges from \$70-\$100, and Chinese herbal medicine can vary drastically depending on quality, method of administration and dose, but in general will be between \$100-\$300 per month.

You could estimate weekly acupuncture treatments for one year (52) at \$85 = \$4420 and daily Chinese herbal medicine for twelve months at \$200 per month = \$2400. So for a full year of consistent acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine, you would pay approximately \$6,820.

This sum is considerably less than an average IVF cycle. In addition to the profound effects on your health and well-being, you are greatly increasing your chances of conception and a healthy child with TCM.

Most extended medical plans in Canada cover acupuncture treatment.

If you have the gift of time and you're not rushing to conceive, preparing your body before pregnancy with TCM is a wise move...a decision I dream that every potential parent would make. It is becoming well accepted that the health of the mother and the father before conception plays a role in determining the health their child will experience throughout life. Being healthy pre-conception may be the best gift you can give your child.

TCM Pattern Identification

It is my belief that the western world could benefit significantly by learning the basic theories of TCM because while structured and scientific, it is a beautiful and artistic way of interpreting the human body and achieving health.

TCM pattern identification is a system of diagnosis that organizes the signs and symptoms a person is presenting so that appropriate diet and lifestyle coaching, acupuncture points and Chinese herbal medicine can be administered.

Some of the terminology you'll hear referenced in TCM may be unfamiliar. Below is a simplified version of the types of diagnosis and what they mean as well as case studies for better understanding.

NOTE: *People often exhibit two or more of these patterns simultaneously and that seemingly conflicting patterns may appear in different parts of the body. For example, hot and cold or damp and dry. This is normal and why a licenced Doctor of TCM should properly diagnose you before any conclusions are drawn through self-diagnosis.*

Heat

General Features: Red skin eruptions like rashes, eczema and acne, constipation with dry stool, anxiety, red tongue with yellow coating, rapid pulse rate, restlessness, easy agitation and anger, high blood pressure, red face, bleeding from the nose or anus, bad breath, canker sores, feeling hot, disliking heat, fever, inflammation, dark yellow urine and a thirst for cold drinks.

Gynecological Features: Heat can manifest as short cycles (less than 26 days) with thicker blood consistency that is bright or dark red in colour and heavy volume. Bleeding may occur outside regular times as in premenstrual spotting. There may also be a lack of cervical fluid.

Interpretations: Heat may appear as inflammation or an overactive immune response, as is the case with allergies. A person with excess Heat might experience high stress and anxiety and be an overachiever. Dehydration can become an issue, particularly if excessive amounts of coffee are relied on for energy. Excesses of male hormones may be present such as with PCOS or hyperthyroidism.

Heat Example

Melanie

- **general info** - Melanie was a 31-year-old lawyer trying to conceive for one year. Her husband was 43 and traveled a lot. Since coming off her IUD one year prior, her cycles had been irregular in length.
- **history** - She admitted to being controlling and smiled with the knowledge that surrendering was an important part of her journey toward family. She emphasized that she was not the type of person to relax so I emphasized that relaxing would be one of our primary goals for treatment. She was extremely active, which may have contributed to her irregular cycles as well as allergies and childhood illnesses that may also have played

a role. She reported that her husband's being away a lot, financial debt and work were all major stressors in her life. All medical testing for both she and her husband came back without issue.

- **presentations** - She had irregular cycles ranging from 26-42 days with a very light menstrual flow and severe pain during periods with many premenstrual symptoms. She was very thin, typically held herself in closed postures and rarely smiled. Heartburn, eczema, aversion to heat and palpitations were present and she had multiple allergies and digestive problems.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Heat affecting the Heart was prominent. This was caused by Liver Qi Stagnation. There was also a pattern of Kidney Yang deficiency/cold resulting in Heart Kidney disharmony. Blood Stasis and Blood deficiency patterns were also displaying but of secondary importance.
- **goals** - Our primary goal was to address the length of her menstrual cycle length and its blood volume. We also worked on improving urinary frequency, stress, heartburn, palpitations, her aversion to heat, allergies, the condition of her skin, sweet cravings, gas, bloating, abdominal pain, painful periods, cervical mucous and PMS. Her ability to surrender and accept what was happening was vital to the outcome.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Acupuncture once a week and a mild dose of Chinese herbal tablets
 - Decreasing coffee consumption and foods that may have been causing inflammation
 - Reducing exercise slightly
 - Paying attention to body signs that indicated ovulation rather than relying on temperature or ovulation strips
 - Having conversations with her husband about the stressors in her life and asking for help
 - Taking CoQ10 and fish oils daily
 - Accepting and surrendering to her circumstances
 - Chiropractic treatments to address her misaligned pelvic structure
- **outcome** - The first couple of months that we worked together, she had 30-day cycles with an increase in menstrual volume. She soon reported a major improvement in her digestive function which at the beginning inhibited her from taking all the recommended supplements and Chinese herbal medicine, but that improved very quickly. She tried a couple of rounds of Clomid (or clomiphene citrate, an oral medication used to help a woman ovulate) which were unsuccessful. After a TCM treatment course of 14 weeks, she decided to take a break from trying to conceive. Two months later, she contacted me to inform me that she was happily 8 weeks pregnant. Her pregnancy was without complication and she delivered a healthy baby boy.
- **cost** - Approximately \$1,500 (included; 3.5 months of weekly acupuncture treatments, daily Chinese herbal tablets and recommended dietary supplements).

Dampness

Features: Slightly overweight, sluggish in overall energy and movement, water retention, loose bowel movements, gas and bloating, fatigue after eating, candida or yeast infections, achy joints, wet tongue, soggy pulse, painful ovulation, stringy mucous in menstrual blood.

Gynecological Features: An accumulation of dampness can manifest as blockage which causes long cycles (35 days) and watery discoloured blood. Painful ovulation and stringy mucous in menstrual blood are also signs of Dampness.

Interpretations: In general, the Damp person has dietary and/or digestive issues and quite likely favors starchy carbohydrates and sugary sweets often due to emotional eating. Fatigue inhibits regular exercise. The lack of exercise and emotional eating often result in weight issues and water retention causing a puffy appearance. They may be difficult to motivate and lazy, the opposite of Yin deficient.

Dampness (Phlegm) Example

Adrienne

- **general info** - Adrienne was a 33 year-old overweight woman with irregular cycles. She often did not ovulate on her own and showed many other characteristics congruent with PCOS. She had been trying to conceive for 14 months when she decided to try TCM.
- **history** - Very irregular ovulation and menses most often brought on by progesterone. Some of her cycles were over 100 days and her basal body temperature was also erratic. Most of her medical testing (thyroid, androgens, glucose) was within range but borderline.
- **presentations** - Irregular cycles, overweight, allergies (asthma, sinusitis, foggy mind), digestive issues (bloating, abdominal pain, heartburn), poor sleep, sweats easily, headaches, restlessness, cankers and acne.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Adrienne is most prominently displaying a Damp/Phlegm pattern. This is causing blockage of necessary functions which regulate ovulation. This pattern is the result of an underlying Qi deficiency and Qi stagnation. Also, due to this blockage, mild Heat is resulting.
- **goals** - Optimizing her reproductive health and fertility by inducing regular ovulation and regulating menstrual cycles. Weight loss through changing dietary habits and improvement of digestion. Regulating allergies and associated symptoms and increasing her sleep quality.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture treatments and daily Chinese herbal medicine
 - Dietary cleanse for one month
 - Eliminating gluten and dairy and drinking more water
 - An overall focus on a whole food plant-based diet
 - Hot foot soaks before bed
 - Increased fat burning activity
 - Implementing an earlier bed time
 - Taking fish oils, Vitamin D and inositol daily supplements
- **outcome** - After 3 months of consistent treatment with acupuncture and with the aid of Clomid, she became pregnant. Unfortunately, this ended in an early miscarriage. We continued with regular acupuncture and incorporated Chinese herbal medicine as well as dietary supplements. She displayed a drastic improvement in allergies and her cycles started to regulate. Her commitment to good diet and exercise never failed. After 37 acupuncture treatments within 10 months and approximately six months of Chinese

herbal medicine without the use of Clomid, she ended up falling pregnant again and carrying to term, giving birth to a healthy baby boy.

- **cost** - Approximately \$4,500 (included 10 months of weekly acupuncture, daily Chinese herbal medicine for five months and recommended dietary supplements).

Yin Deficiency

Features: Night sweats, hot flashes, thin body, lack of bodily fluids, restlessness, flushed cheeks, light sleep and a persistent gnawing hunger.

Gynecological Features: Light volume of menstrual blood and cervical mucous that can lead to absence of ovulation and menstruation.

Interpretations: The phrase ‘burning the candle at both ends’ applies to this person. They are often restless with a lot on their minds, hence the difficulty shutting down properly at night to rest. These people tend to be quite rigid in character and may look tired or withered.

Yin Deficiency Example

Summer

- **general info** - Summer was a 38 year-old health care professional diagnosed with high FSH and diminished ovarian reserve (DOR). Originally she came to see me to optimize her chances of success with her upcoming IVF cycle. Her first child was conceived via IVF.
- **history** - FSH high, antral follicle count low and a diminished ovarian reserve. She’d had her first child via IVF two years ago. She had previously been slightly overactive with exercise but had cut back. While consistently undergoing acupuncture treatments, she went through two back-to-back IVF cycles within five months, the first resulting in an early miscarriage at five weeks. The first stimulated four follicles and the second only two, with one fertilized and transferred on day three post egg retrieval. She decided to take a break and regroup before doing another possible IVF cycle. This was when we implemented Chinese herbal medicine to restore balance and improve reproductive potential.
- **presentations** - Thin athletic-type body, night sweats and poor sleeping habits in general, scanty clotted menses, extreme emotional stress in the form of anxiety, fear and irritability, especially with her husband. Bowels that alternated between loose to constipated, multiple premenstrual symptoms, multiple digestive complaints, eczema and low libido.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Summer primarily displayed Yin deficiency. She also had a clear pattern of Qi Stagnation. Both Yin deficiency and Qi stagnation were creating Heat, which may have been responsible for the high FSH and difficulties stimulating with IVF medications.
- **goals** - To optimize her reproductive health and fertility by alleviating night sweats, soothing the emotional stress in her life, regulating bowel movements and digestion, increasing menstrual volume and reducing clotted menses.

- **recommendations & treatment** – Unwavering commitment to weekly acupuncture appointments and daily Chinese herbal medicine. My plan was to systematically reduce the number of tasks she was doing daily in regards to her ‘fertility’ enhancement.
- **outcome** - After 33 acupuncture treatments (supporting two full IVF cycles) and only three months of taking Chinese herbal medicine (and deciding against more IVF), Summer became much more relaxed, displayed a drastic increase in cervical mucous and sleep quality, an increase in PMS (which can sometimes be a positive biomarker for improved hormonal function in women of advanced maternal age) and fell pregnant, naturally! She went on to have a beautiful baby boy.
- **cost** - Approximately \$3,300 (included eight months of weekly acupuncture treatments, recommended dietary supplements and Chinese herbal medicine for three months).

Commentary - *This is a classic case of a woman who was doing too much, trying to accomplish pregnancy versus taking the steps necessary to receive pregnancy. She was a ‘doer’ and because of this was a very accomplished woman, respected by all those around her as being ‘the one that knows’. It was only when she decided to step back from trying so hard, stop convincing herself that IVF is the only way she could become pregnant, let her body’s innate wisdom shine through and take a course of reproductive-enhancing Chinese herbal medicine, that she was finally in a place to allow pregnancy to occur and it did. We became very close with each session consisting of profound conversations about her deeper inner needs and requirements for holistic health.*

Update - *Just before the publication of this book, I received an email from Summer reporting that she had again spontaneously conceived - naturally!*

Yang Deficiency/Coldness

Features: Whole body is cold, lower back pain and/or knee pain that is relieved by heat, low libido, often lethargic, water retention and a puffy pale bright complexion are common.

Gynecological Features: Cold can cause blockage with blood and bodily fluids creating painful periods with light bleeding known as a cold uterus. Yang Qi deficiency can cause heavy bleeding and copious cervical mucous of watery consistency.

Interpretations: Because of low energy, motivation to exercise is minimal, sometimes encouraging excess weight. Yang deficiency and coldness can often be attached to advanced maternal age and kidney deficiency.

Yang Deficiency/Coldness Example

Barb

- **general info** - Barb was 40 years old and had been trying to conceive for over four years without success. She and her husband were married when she was 35 and began the journey of trying to conceive almost immediately.
- **history** - Medical testing showed that her ovarian reserve was diminished and she was told that her egg quality was most likely poor. Semen analysis showed low motility, morphology and borderline low concentration.

- **presentations** - She had a bright pale complexion, was slightly overweight and complained of frequently being cold. Her libido was very low. She loved running but had to stop due to pain in her knees. She reported that her menses were very heavy, watery in consistency and contained many large purple clots.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Barb was very clearly displaying Yang deficient Cold patterns. This was most likely due to a combination of genetics and advanced maternal age.
- **goals** - From a TCM perspective, optimizing her reproductive health and fertility was accomplished by improving her menses, losing weight, improving libido and increasing her subjective body warmth.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture appointments and daily Chinese herbal medicine
 - Making sleep a priority
 - Four half-hour sessions of aerobic jogging each week to burn fat
 - Drinking only warm water
 - Focusing on nutrition while drastically limiting raw and cold food intake
 - Creating boundaries on taking work home with her
 - Scheduling regular quality time with friends
 - Cleaning her house and life of all toxic substances
 - Taking high doses of CoQ10
- **outcome** - She reported that her key to being able to stick to the plan was that she wanted to be an example of a healthy mother to her child. This resulted in an overall improvement with her menstrual imbalances, losing 21 pounds, and an increase in sexual interest. Barb became pregnant in just over seven months of TCM treatments. She carried to full term and gave birth to a healthy baby boy.
- **cost** - Approximately \$3,800 (included seven months of weekly acupuncture treatments, daily Chinese herbal medicine and recommended dietary supplements).

Qi Deficiency

Features: Fatigue, poor digestion such as gas and bloating, loose stool, weak immune function, worry, fear and pensiveness.

Gynecological Features: Qi deficiency can cause heavy bleeding and copious cervical mucous of watery consistency. Menstrual cycles may be short with bleeding of heavy volume and watery consistency. Bleeding may also happen outside regular times as in premenstrual spotting.

Interpretations: Fatigue is a common complaint among the Qi deficient. Digestive function can be due to poor food choices and fatigue-based decisions may perpetuate the cycle. Exercise, deep breathing and healthy food choices are often the cure for this mild to moderate state. This can be the early stages of Dampness or Yang deficiency and a good time to make changes before it gets harder to do so.

Qi Deficiency Example

Shannon

- **general info** - Shannon was 35 years-old. Shortly after trying to conceive, she became pregnant. Unfortunately, after eleven weeks, the baby stopped growing and a natural miscarriage followed by a surgical abortion to ensure a full evacuation of the uterus was done. The trauma was immense but she was ready to try again. Fear of another miscarriage was quite powerful and was addressed through the treatment of the Qi of the Kidneys which manages fear and will power. She had come to traditional Chinese medicine for support as she began her journey of conception again and to be an integral piece in helping produce a healthy pregnancy and carry to term.
- **history** - No medical testing or diagnostics were undertaken. Factor V Laiden (a blood clotting disorder) was in her immediate family so she was considering testing for this as it has implications with blood clotting and possible contributions to miscarriage.
- **presentations** - Shannon had gained a lot of weight since her miscarriage and to her detriment, had an unrelenting work ethic. She did not get enough sleep and had some bad habits such as soda and dairy consumption. She quite clearly had emotional stagnation manifesting as irritability and seemed easily frustrated with others. She showed a number of possible signs of inflammation such as anxiety, restlessness, aversion to heat, cankers, allergies, dry skin, psoriasis and the preference for cold drinks. The Qi deficiency was highlighted by her emotional eating, sweet cravings, ankle swelling, nasal drip, fatigue after eating, difficulty waking in the morning, pensiveness, weight issues and sweating without exertion. She also reported many premenstrual symptoms plaguing her each month.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Shannon primarily displayed a pattern of Spleen Qi Deficiency. This root pattern was giving rise to the accumulation of both Dampness and Phlegm. The Dampness and Phlegm combined with the moderate Qi Stagnation she also displayed was causing the formation of Heat which was rising to the Heart. The Heart was already experiencing non-free flow due to the emotional toll the second trimester miscarriage had taken on her.
- **goals** - Reducing her weight, allergies, sweet cravings, pensiveness, PMS, menstrual pain, clotting and improving her sleep and cervical mucous.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture treatments
 - Stopping the antidepressants she was taking (her decision)
 - Eliminating soda pop and dairy consumption and increasing water intake
 - Incorporating daily femoral massage and nightly foot soaks
 - Finding ways to better manage stress at work
 - Getting more sleep
 - Exercising more
 - Spending more time in nature
 - Avoiding environmental toxins
 - Starting on a whole food homocysteine blend (Vitamin B6, folate, and B12)
 - Adopting a more plant-based whole food diet and reducing starchy carbohydrate intake
 - Getting back in touch with her Christian roots to nourish her spiritual side
- **outcome** - After two months of the above recommendations, Shannon got pregnant. Regular acupuncture continued weekly until 22 weeks when she felt comfortable that all

was well with the pregnancy. Her little boy was born healthy and happy a couple of weeks before his due date.

- **cost** - Approximately \$2,800 (included 7.5 months of weekly acupuncture treatments and recommended dietary supplements).

Blood Deficiency

Features: Pale complexion and nails, dryness of skin, nose, throat, eyes, hair and nails, scanty menstruation and possible anemia.

Gynecological Features: Light or scanty bleeding that may be pale or diluted with a watery consistency. Cycle is often long as it takes the body more time to mature the egg and build the uterine lining.

Interpretations: This pattern often accompanies Qi deficiency and is a stage that if left unchecked, may eventually become Yin deficiency. It is most often a result of excessive emotions causing poor digestion which in turn does not produce enough blood.

Blood Deficiency Example

Tina

- **general info** - Tina was a 35 year-old teacher with a very difficult group of students that year. She had been trying to conceive naturally for almost two years. Within this time, she'd had two early miscarriages. She had recently taken some time off work to cope with anxiety and depression. She also admitted to not exercising.
- **history** - Medical testing repeatedly showed iron deficient anemia. Both miscarriages required medications to fully evacuate the pregnancy. Her tubes were clear after a recent hysterosalpingogram (HSG), an x-ray dye test, but they did find and remove two polyps. Tina and her husband were considering IVF but wanted to give TCM a chance first and at the very least, be prepared in body mind and spirit for the IVF.
- **presentations** - Menstrual cycles were usually 35-40 days in length, with very light flow that was pale red and diluted or watery. Her complexion, tongue and nails were very pale and she complained of hair loss, always being tired, dizzy spells, difficulty falling asleep and dull headaches when tired. She had extremely dry skin, poor digestion including, gas, bloating and dry bitty stools and was slightly underweight.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, Tina was presenting with Blood deficiency caused by Spleen deficiency digestive problems, quite likely from a genetic predisposition as her mother is very similar in health history and appearance.
- **goals** - Improving diet and digestion, shortening her cycles and increasing menstrual flow volume, returning colour and moisture back to her skin, supporting her emotionally and helping her sleep better.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture treatments and Chinese herbal medicine daily to help build and restore her depleted state
 - Highly nutritious plant-based whole foods that were mostly cooked to improve digestion. Soups, stews and smoothies were her foundation.

- Eliminating dairy and increasing water intake
 - Fish oils, vitamin D, homocysteine blend (B6, folate, B12) and probiotics were recommended
 - Consistent yoga practice three times per week
 - One half hour of jogging four times a week
 - Tina also took the remaining five months off of teaching and really took care of herself.
- **outcome** - After 20 acupuncture treatments and five months of consistent Chinese herbal medicine administration, Tina's cycles shortened to an average of 30-32 days and bleeding volume increased. She was sleeping better, eating better and felt better overall with more energy and a sense of well-being. She became pregnant again and continued on with the acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine through the first trimester to help prevent another miscarriage. She had a healthy baby girl.
 - **cost** - Approximately \$2,900 (included five months of weekly acupuncture treatments, daily Chinese herbal medicine and recommended dietary supplements).

Blood Stasis

Features: Blood Stasis is almost always (aside from trauma) a result of other patterns of disharmony such as Qi stagnation, Coldness, Dampness, Phlegm or Heat. Over time, the condition of Blood Stasis typically leads to Heat and/or Blood deficiency. Common manifestations are fixed stabbing or severe pain, spider veins, dusky complexion and darkening patches of skin.

Gynecological Features: Clotted menstrual bleeding that is brown, purple, or black. Periods will often be light and be severely painful.

Interpretations: Blood Stasis can result from almost any of the other patterns being present over a period of time. If Qi is stagnated, or other blockages ensue due to cold, lack of Yang, Dampness or Heat, eventually blood circulation will be impeded. There is a well-known saying in 'Statements of Fact in TCM' by Bob Flaws that any chronic disease will involve Blood Stasis.

Blood Stasis Example

Samantha

- **general info** - Samantha had recently been through two miscarriages and was not quite ready to get pregnant again. She felt off and wanted to get right. My instincts were that she needed to better manage emotional stress, improve blood circulation and have her heart healed. Ultimately she needed a break from her in-laws but that wasn't possible so we utilized Chinese medicine to help her adjust to her circumstances.
- **history** - Her doctors had told her she couldn't get any testing done as she had not had three losses and that it was likely an egg quality issue. Basic fertility testing had never been done. Even if diagnostic testing had taken place, there is little treatment for recurrent loss.
- **presentations** - Fear and frustration trumped all else with Samantha. Sleep was very light and plagued with night sweats. She suffered from intense pelvic pain during sex and on

the first two days of her period. Both back and neck pain were also quite severe. She had spider veins and darkening patches of skin particularly around her armpits and near skin folds. Her tongue was purple and dusky in colour and her cervical mucous was scant.

- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, she was clearly presenting both Blood Stasis and Qi Stagnation, so our primary principles of treatment were to restore optimal blood circulation and soothe emotional blockage.
- **goals** - Soothing emotions and managing stress to reduce the chances of miscarriage and aid in carrying pregnancy to term. Instilling more peace of mind and stress reduction surrounding circumstances in her life, helping her mind and body heal and get strong enough to conquer her fear and feel ready to conceive again, improving sleep, reducing pelvic pain, eliminating night sweats, reducing back pain and neck tension and increasing cervical mucous.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture treatments and Chinese herbal medicine daily
 - A dietary cleanse for one month
 - With everything that was going on in her life that was out of her control, I strongly suggested doing some work with our Integrated Professional Life Coach, Thomas Kevin Dolan
 - Supplements including vitamin D, fish oils, CoQ10, and a homocysteine blend (vitamin B6, folate, B12)
 - Eliminating soda pop, dairy and gluten
 - Avoiding toxins that are known endocrine disruptors
 - Moderate exercise
 - Nurturing her spirit
 - Self-administering castor oil packs and femoral massage in her follicular phase (cycle day 1 to ovulation) to help optimize blood circulation to reproductive organs
- **outcome** - From my experience, Blood Stasis and Qi Stagnation are two patterns that respond quite quickly to treatment with acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. When treatment restores overall smooth flow to both Qi and Blood, these are the types of stories I receive:

“When I met Spence, he listened to my thoughts, fears and concerns. It was nice to be able to tell someone everything I had kept inside for so long. Spence was extremely kind and compassionate, he seemed to understand exactly what I was feeling and going through. I left his office feeling hopeful, and went home feeling positive. My husband seemed relieved and somewhat excited to see me so happy. I no longer felt alone. I felt like someone was working with me toward a common goal and was going to help me. It was a good feeling. It has now been a little under two months since I first met Spence. In this time, I have been receiving acupuncture sessions and taking Chinese herbs at Spence's recommendation. I have cut sugar, gluten and dairy from my diet completely. I have never felt better. I can't really explain what has started to bring my sense of self back. I can't even explain what made me awaken and realize that I needed to stand still, surrender and embrace what was happening to me. I needed to live in the moment enjoying what I have, in this moment. As I sit here writing this, I feel a smile on my face, and warmth in my heart that I have not felt for a long time. No, I am not pregnant, not yet

anyway, but I am no longer afraid to try again. What I have realized in this short time is that I matter, and for so long I had forgotten that. I wish I had walked into Spence's office a year ago, but it's never too late for anything. I truly believe that Spence has made a difference in my life. Whether it's the Acupuncture, the herbs or my healthy diet; my body, mind and spirit has started to find its way back to me. I feel light-hearted, happier and hopeful. My husband has noticed a drastic difference in my mood, my body language and my overall presence. I am very grateful to Spence; his guidance and kindness has truly made a difference in my life."

The cycle after she wrote this, Samantha became pregnant again. She continued with weekly acupuncture treatments and daily Chinese herbal medicine through her first trimester. This time she carried to term with no complications.

- **cost** - Approximately \$3,000 (included 5.5 months of weekly acupuncture treatments, daily Chinese herbal medicine and recommended dietary supplements - including first trimester of pregnancy).

Qi Stagnation

"Holding onto Anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." ~Buddha

Features: Qi stagnation, most typically of the liver, has its causative root in the deregulation of emotions. Common manifestations are feeling emotionally stuck, irritable, angry, impatient, frustrated, unfulfilled and stressed out.

Gynecological Features: Length of menstrual cycle will often be irregular--sometimes late, sometimes early with bleeding that starts and stops. Mild to moderate pain before and during the period is common. PMS signs and symptoms such as moodiness, breast tenderness, nausea and bloating are prominent.

Interpretations: If a person feels stuck, unfulfilled, not in control of their emotions, stressed out, overwhelmed and full of anxiety, then they likely have Qi stagnation. One might say that to some degree, this is almost every adult on earth and they are right. Management of this pattern is a part of every treatment plan I create. It should be highlighted that there are many degrees and severities of this pattern.

Qi Stagnation Example

Charlotte

- **general info** - Already very frustrated and impatient, 33 year-old lawyer Charlotte had been trying to conceive for seven months so inducing a greater state of inner peace was my ultimate goal for her. Being calm does not mean getting less done; it is just an adjustment of attitude while completing tasks. She was a very strong lady who knew what she wanted and was ready to put the plans into action to accomplish her goals. We went through exactly what the next three months would look like so that I could be Charlotte's accountability partner each week when we met.

- **history** - No medical testing had been done to date except basic blood work such as thyroid and complete blood count, which was all normal. I suggested an HSG to check if her tubes were clear.
- **presentations** - In addition to being a very Type 'A' (i.e., supercharged, impatient, restless and over-exercising), her bowel movements alternated from loose to constipated and felt unfinished. She had sleep issues, partook in emotional eating, experienced headaches, cold hands and feet, neck tension, sighing, night sweats, low libido, acne, difficulty waking in morning, gas and bloating, was slightly overweight and craved sweets. She had only three days of menstrual flow that was clotted and moderately painful with many prominent premenstrual symptoms.
- **pattern(s)** - According to TCM, she presented with textbook Qi Stagnation. This also caused concurrent patterns such as mild Blood Stasis, depressive Heat rising to her Heart and Qi deficiency which resulted in some Dampness accumulation.
- **goals** - To calm her spirit and reduce restlessness, irritability and impatience. I also wanted to relieve her back pain, increase menstrual blood flow, reduce clotting and PMS, improve her sleep, regulate bowel movements, reduce headaches, neck tension and sighing, improve her digestion and encourage weight loss.
- **recommendations & treatment** -
 - Weekly acupuncture treatments and Chinese herbal medicine daily
 - Changing her thinking about down time being boring and unproductive. The word 'opening' which is what acupuncture does, was brought up a lot. She really resonated with the concept of conception being about reception, not accomplishment. It is often a challenge to explain to people how TCM will benefit them in a language they understand. Since she was a litigator, I used the language of negotiation (i.e., I will allow two Yin yoga classes each week if she gave up two of her three spin classes). We did this with various dietary concepts and lifestyle habits as well. It was quite incredible how involved she was in the creation of her plan and when negotiations were done, she was passionately committed and excited. It was inspiring to see.
 - Understanding when ovulation was occurring through self-monitoring
- **outcome** - The transformations I was fortunate enough to witness with this woman paid off quickly. After only two months of deep commitment to our plan, she became pregnant and nine months later gave birth to a healthy little girl. She continued with acupuncture through the first and most of the second trimester of pregnancy as there was much spotting and lots of debilitating nausea, then powerful headaches throughout the first few weeks of the second trimester. It is cases like these that I cherish deeply. When I get to watch someone's whole life shift toward wellness, I know the effects of our time together will have positive implications on her health and well-being forever.
- **cost** - Approximately \$2500 (included six months of weekly acupuncture treatments, recommended dietary supplements, and two months of pre-pregnancy daily Chinese herbal medicine).

In Step Three, we will go into the importance of diet in curing these conditions and which foods will be beneficial and what to avoid.

Integration

I respect western medicine; it has given us so much. I have seen assisted reproductive technologies such as In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) help women and couples have children that otherwise would not have been able to; for example, with blocked fallopian tubes. It is a wonderful technology that can help improve any woman or couples' chances of conception. Without western medicine, premature babies would rarely survive, penicillin would not have saved millions of lives and many more women would still be dying in childbirth. It is my belief that both western and eastern medicine have something to contribute and when used together, can have greater results. In fact, I believe we live in a time where the integration of different styles of medicine and healing are producing a massive leap in the evolution of human health.

But the philosophies do vary quite drastically.

Reductionism (the belief that any complex system is nothing more than the sum of its parts) is the foundation of western medical practice. Western practice uses randomized controlled research and statistics to explain the human body and to categorize people. Traditional Chinese Medicine takes into account the whole individualized picture and is aptly referred to as (w)holistic (the belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts).

From a western medical perspective, the top three diagnosis women come to me with are:

Unexplained

There is no such thing as unexplained infertility in Chinese Medicine. Unexplained just means we have to look harder and get to the root of things. It takes commitment and perseverance but there is an explanation and together we will find it and fix it. Quite often this has an emotional component and that is something that is very hard to measure but often not hard to fix.

Male Factor

We'll talk more about this in Step Ten, but in short, the man is just as responsible for healthy conception as the woman. Because a woman carries the baby and the importance of egg quality dominates western medical thinking, a lot of the blame for infertility is often placed on her when in fact the man plays a vital role in conception. His diet and lifestyle are just as important to his sperm quality as a woman's is to her eggs. The Chinese have a beautiful term for the constitution of an unborn child--"pre-heaven essence" and the future father of a child contributes exactly half of this poetic terminology.

Advanced Maternal Age (AMA)

Like unexplained infertility, this is a bit of a catch-all phrase that can be specified and often overcome with some digging and dedication. While it may be easier to get pregnant in your twenties, as long as a woman is still menstruating there is potential to bear children.

By contrast, the six causes of infertility and any other dis-ease in the body according to Chinese Medicine are:

External Evils: From a modern perspective this would include bacteria, viruses, medications, environmental toxins and/or smoking, as well as some mental disorders.

Overwork: Since age is a considerable factor in infertility these days, ask yourself if you are putting financial certainty before having a child. If you are working too hard, is there even room for a baby? If a baby is your priority, then it is important to live your life in a way that is conducive to the welcoming of this priority. Career or financial advancement must take a back seat, or at the very least share the spotlight.

Diet: We will go into more detail about finding what is right for you in the step on diet but in short, lots of colorful food provides the required nutrition for fertility and healthy pregnancy, and portions need to be controlled.

Emotions: Stress creates disease and comes in many disguises from sadness and anger to loneliness and anxiety. We will talk more about this throughout the book because its impact is huge. Remember to check in with yourself throughout the day and take a deep breath to see where you're at. Healthy mind, healthy body.

Activity Level: Too much or too little can be detrimental so find what's right for you. If you're at a desk all day, go for a 20-minute walk or incorporate some stretches in your day. And if you train every day and participate in a triathlon every three months, maybe slow down a little. It's all about finding balance.

Trauma: Your body is both immensely strong and a delicate balance. Trauma can be interpreted as STI's, a D&C procedure (surgical procedure used to clean the uterus of the products of conception due to a non-viable pregnancy or abortion), injuries sustained from sporting accidents (particularly for men), surgery or a car accident that has thrown off pelvic structure. There are corrections for these traumas though, so don't feel like there is nothing you can do or it's out of your hands.

As far as fertility is concerned, there are both obvious and some not-so-obvious adaptations a person can make to their lives in order to get a handle on these causes, putting the patient much more in a proactive role rather than feeling helpless. And that brings me to our next topic: what can you do? Set some goals.

In Chinese Medicine, the body is considered a garden and you the gardener. For a bountiful harvest, in this case a healthy child, you must do so much more than plant a seed. Tend the soil, give your garden plenty of water, fertilize it and see that it gets plenty of sunshine. With careful tending, your garden will flourish and you will reap its abundance.

What does a course of TCM treatment involve?

Since the most important paradigm of TCM is the individualization of treatment, courses of action will vary from person to person to meet their specific needs. The two primary tools are

Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. They may be used separately or in combination, depending on the requirements of the patient and determined by the doctor.

Acupuncture is usually administered one to two times per week, and Chinese herbal medicine is taken daily via pills or teas. Consistency and commitment is key for treatment to be effective.

Here are some examples of conditions I see and possible accompanying treatment plans:

- **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)** is determined by the presence of multiple cysts on the ovaries, excess androgen levels (male hormones), irregular ovulation and menstrual cycles, and insulin resistance. PCOS is a condition that often requires six to twelve months of acupuncture and herbal medicine to restore hormonal balance and regular ovulation. Ideally we like to see three healthy menstrual cycles before trying to conceive and falling pregnant. Due to miscarriage rates being higher in this patient population, TCM treatment continues through the first trimester of pregnancy.
- **Unexplained infertility** often responds very favorably with two to three months of TCM treatments. This is a diagnosis common in women in their early 30's. If there are no other confounding conditions, women with unexplained infertility very often fall pregnant within six months of starting TCM.
- Women and couples that have decided to go through **In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)** can increase their chances of success and decrease the associated stress levels by incorporating TCM into the weeks and months prior to the IVF treatment. Our goal for any woman is to have at least nine acupuncture treatments in the 2.5 to 3 months before embryo transfer. Depending on the presenting reproductive health conditions, more time and more treatment before starting the IVF may be recommended (this often includes the husband if male factor infertility is present). In the 2-4 weeks before embryo transfer, Chinese herbal medicine is stopped (unless it is a special case) and acupuncture is increased in frequency to twice per week. Our treatment goals at this time are to regulate emotions, reduce stress and promote blood circulation through the reproductive organs to improve ovarian and uterine response to IVF medications. Then two acupuncture treatments are administered on site at the IVF clinic immediately before and after embryo transfer. Following transfer, acupuncture treatments are again recommended once a week until the end of the first trimester to ensure pregnancy is stable, nausea is managed and your body is supported during the hormonal changes that are occurring.
- **Stress and anxiety** can show drastic improvements in only one to two months of consistent acupuncture and lifestyle modifications.
- **Recurrent pregnancy loss (RPL)** is largely about providing emotional support, the cultivation of willpower and the management of fear, as well as improving circulation issues that could be impeding healthy pregnancies. I often recommend at least two to three months without trying to conceive after a miscarriage, even if the body and menstrual cycle have bounced back to a state of health and regularity. For most women, this time is well spent healing the heart and preparing the body for another pregnancy. Then again when pregnant, treatment continues throughout the first trimester and often much further or the whole pregnancy in its entirety, mostly due to the request of the mother-to-be. It should also be noted that sperm may be playing a role in recurrent loss, so treating the male partner is also important.

- **Male factor infertility** is more cut and dry. With many men, there are very few health signs and symptoms to monitor (in comparison to a woman and menstrual cycle characteristics) and determine treatment benefits, so we assume that sperm quality is being affected with the proper consistent administration of acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine and lifestyle recommendations. Twelve acupuncture treatments within a six to twelve week period is considered one course of treatment, and often two courses of treatment are required to see improvement.
- **Thyroid conditions** such as hypothyroidism or Hashimoto's autoimmune thyroiditis require dedication and in my experience at least six months of TCM, supplements and lifestyle changes to ensure balance optimal for conception.
- **Advanced Maternal Age (AMA)** and **Diminished Ovarian Reserve (DOR)** require acupuncture one to two times per week until pregnancy is confirmed, then continues throughout much of the first two trimesters. Chinese herbal medicine is absolutely necessary in these cases. This treatment often requires six to twelve months to begin to display effect. If assisted reproductive technologies such as IVF with PGD (Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis) are being considered, TCM offers support and optimization for success. I counsel this patient population not to wait very long before making this choice, as it is well known that age is the single most important determining factor in IVF success. Time is of the essence.
- Our primary goal with **Endometriosis** is to reduce pain which in my experience TCM is extremely effective for. Our secondary goals are to improve fertility, balance hormone levels and reduce inflammation surrounding the ovaries and uterus. Acupuncture is recommended once to twice per week and Chinese herbal medicine is taken daily until noticeable changes have been observed. It may be necessary to adjust frequency of the acupuncture sessions to address a certain time and need during the menstrual cycle. In some cases, symptoms get worse around ovulation and continue to increase in intensity until menstruation, therefore more frequent treatment during this time may be indicated. In other cases, the pain is felt only with menstruation, while others experience pain throughout their cycle. Our goal is to see three menstrual cycles with minimal or complete absence of pain. This indicates to us that levels of inflammation have decreased and hormone levels are returning to a more healthy balance.
- **Pregnancy-related conditions** such as nausea and pain, as well as turning breech babies and preparing for labour, are all strong suits of TCM. Pain is usually addressed with frequent acupuncture treatments until relief is obtained. Nausea is most often only an affliction of the first trimester, and depending on severity, one to three acupuncture treatments per week may be necessary. Moxibustion to turn breech babies is best done between the 33rd and 36th week, and preparing for labour involves the administration of acupuncture once per week from week 36-40.

Story

Suzanne W.

"I was 36.5 when my husband and I decided to start a family and within three months, I was pregnant. I had an easy pregnancy and an easy birth and we loved being parents so two years later, we started trying for our second. Since we'd had such an easy time with our first daughter,

we didn't think it would be a problem, but after six months of trying with no luck, we decided to seek help.

Doctors told me that I essentially had no eggs left and that my FSH levels were 16-20. I was told that I had a 4% chance at best, possibly 8% with the highest dose of fertility drugs and that my best bet was to go to the U.S. for an egg donation. The thought of buying an egg wasn't what I wanted but I had to consider my husband.

We were shocked and devastated. We wondered how this was possible, when we'd had a daughter so easily two years before. I kept the entire ordeal to myself, with the exception of my mom. I didn't want to hear any unsolicited advice or sympathy from people.

After hormone shots and a failed IUI attempt, we decided we would try a round of IVF and if it didn't work we would decide the next steps, probably to stop trying and try to be happy with one child, but I know we would have been very disappointed. We went through the hormone shots again and they thought they may be able to retrieve three eggs but after harvest, we only had one viable egg. I was beyond disappointed – the women in recovery next to me had twelve eggs! That Friday we went home with little hope. They would give us updates to see if the embryo would multiply. Miraculously, it did! It was amazing and on Monday we went back to have it implanted. Just before my 40th birthday in March, we were told we were pregnant.

I did acupuncture with Dr. Pentland once a week leading up to the IVF implantation. The day of implantation, I had before and after treatment, then continued until I was pregnant and throughout the pregnancy up to about 6 months. The sessions left me feeling peaceful, relaxed and positive.

I was monitored quite regularly since the doctors were worried about miscarriage and high blood pressure and I truly believe that the acupuncture, relaxation and positive energy from Spence were a big reason the IVF worked and I carried to term a healthy baby girl. Listening to the tapes and imagining the egg and uterus was amazing. I don't usually go for non-traditional, non-western medicine but I know this is what kept me relaxed.

Doctors said once a year they get the "amazing" result and we were the couple. I was the only woman with a less than 5% chance that had one egg on the first try that was successful.

Today we have two daughters, Katherine who is four and a half, and miracle baby Hannah who is a year and a half now. We are done and we are so happy. Being a parent is the most rewarding job in the world and also the hardest. It teaches you unconditional love, selflessness and patience."

Chapter Task:

List three things you learned about TCM:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For reference, list your top 2 or 3 TCM patterns (i.e., Heat, Qi Stagnation, Dampness, etc.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write down any questions you still have about TCM:

Bring these questions to your Doctor of TCM.

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Step Two

Goal Setting:

Getting from point A to point B by breaking down what needs to be done

“Change is never a matter of ability, it is always a matter of motivation born from a compelling ‘why’. Once you are clear on your ‘why’ setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.” ~Tony Robbins

The goal of anyone experiencing infertility is to have a child. When times are trying, and you are adapting your lifestyle in what might be challenging ways, that is the goal that needs to be kept in mind. Sometimes when you’ve been trying for a while, this ultimate goal can seem frustratingly unreachable so breaking it down into more manageable steps is key. That’s what we’re going to talk about in this section.

It is my belief that the most important step in achieving anything is the process of goal setting. Without a target, how can one hit it? With clear goals and vision, each choice you make throughout each day can be evaluated by asking yourself, is this choice bringing me closer to my dream?

As a doctor, I determine my goals for treatment from the initial intake forms and the first appointment. By diagnosing the prominent signs and symptoms I feel are important to work on, combined with our joint decisions about larger aspects of life and your family vision, we provide the framework for setting goals. These goals become a guide to ensure we are staying on the path that we have created together.

Once your goals are clear and you are doing everything in your power to obtain them, it is time to surrender. Not everyone is ready to hear this and it can be tough to relinquish control, but having faith in your body is of paramount importance. Patience is one of the primary attributes of a good parent and you might want to think of this time as a dress rehearsal for what’s to come.

While each person’s path to fertility will vary, I have found that after a decade of working with couples trying to conceive that the following four steps can be a recipe for success:

1. Take care of yourself (set those goals).
2. Do your best to surrender and accept your circumstances.
3. Have faith that your dreams will come true.
4. Persevere.

Breaking down your goals into obtainable and sustainable steps and sticking with them for enough time to allow the magic of the compound effect to manifest is the key to success. When

setting goals, remember the wise words of Jim Collins (author of ‘Good to Great’): “*If you have more than three priorities you don’t have any.*” Figure out what is most necessary for you to do to accomplish your goals, forget about everything else and keep it simple.

Here are some examples of possible goals for specific reproductive health conditions (the use of TCM should be assumed with each condition presented):

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS): With PCOS, ideally, our main goal is to see three healthy regular menstrual cycles before trying to conceive. When the recommended plan and lifestyle changes below are deeply committed to, three healthy regular menstrual cycles and pregnancy can be achieved for some within a 6-12 month TCM treatment period. PCOS is most often multifactorial and the clinical picture can vary drastically from woman to woman. Irregular ovulation, excess androgens (male hormones), and issues with insulin resistance or blood sugar balance are the current diagnostic triad of PCOS (a woman does not have to present with cystic ovaries to receive this diagnosis). Therefore, the goals of a woman with PCOS may look something like this:

- Hormonal balance - A myriad of hormonal storms are often associated with PCOS. A thorough endocrine evaluation is recommended to properly guide treatment (thyroid, adrenals, ovarian, pituitary, pancreatic, etc.).
- Diet - Low carbohydrate/sugar, high fiber, whole foods and proteins. The glycemic load must be reduced when insulin resistance and blood sugar imbalance is present. Reduction of portions if necessary.
- Inositol (vitamin B8) - May aid in the balancing of androgens and estrogens, stabilize mood and make cells more sensitive to insulin. For more information, see Step Five.
- Exercise - especially if overweight, both aerobic fat burning and weight training are essential to success in management of PCOS. Regular weight training is very effective in the regulation of blood sugar.
- Electro-acupuncture (acupuncture with the addition of small electrodes on needles to enhance stimulation) - Acupuncture administered once per week for an average of 15-20 weeks helps restore regular ovulation in many women. A study recently published in the journal, *Acta Diabetologia*, showed that acupuncture decreased insulin resistance (Benrick, 2014).

“There is an immeasurable distance between late and too late.” ~Og Mandino

Advanced Maternal Age (AMA): The primary goal with AMA is to optimize the quality of the remaining eggs, ovarian and uterine environment, and reproductive essence. Simply put, eliminating everything we know that causes aging is required. Most people understand what not to do if the desire is to look radiant and keep skin looking young. Fertility is not that different, as your skin, similarly to fertility, is a manifestation of your overall health and well-being. It should also be emphasized that just because you are of advanced maternal age, it doesn’t mean that you will not have the family you dream of. The path may just require a little more work on your part. In this age group (>38), if IVF is being considered, preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is a new advancement that may play a key role in success. It may be slightly cost prohibitive at the time of this publication, but I strongly encourage learning more about this comprehensive

chromosomal screening to see if it is the right fit for you. A sample goal list for women of advanced maternal age would be something like this:

- Exercise - To ensure good circulation, regular cardio is a must. This also helps with stress.
- Sleep - The importance of sleep cannot be overstated. This is when the body gets a chance to regenerate and nourish itself. Make getting enough quality sleep a priority.
- Reducing workload - When we are not 25 but want our body to act this way, we must give ourselves the time required to nurture oneself, to slow down and conserve vital energy and focus for reproduction.
- Nutrition - Special attention needs to be given to eating highly nutritious foods to ensure that the body is getting more than it requires. For more information, see Step Five.
- CoQ10 - Preliminary evidence shows CoQ10 may have an effect on improving egg quality. For more information, see Step Five.

Diminished Ovarian Reserve (DOR) / High FSH / Low AMH / Low AFC:

Often, but not always associated with age, diminished ovarian reserve, i.e. low AFC (antral follicle count), high FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) and low AMH (antimullerian hormone) are all important test results which show a woman may be close to the end of her reproductive years and that egg quality may not be what it once was. This is a very challenging time for women as the clock begins ticking more loudly and many IVF centres may not even accept them as patients. At this point, a woman's chances of conceiving naturally may be better (with the aid of TCM and acupuncture, supplements and lifestyle changes) than with IVF or other assisted reproductive technologies (ART). There is still hope, and it is important that you do not turn against yourself with emotions of regret, anger and resentment. This is a time more than ever when you must put trust in your body and do all you can to restore balance and deep holistic health to your life. The following suggestions are important if you have received this diagnosis:

- Chinese herbal medicine - This is likely one of the most powerful tools that exists when attempting to improve their reproductive potential when faced with any or all of these diagnosis. Six to twelve months of administration is recommended.
- Anti-inflammatory diet - Inflammation could very well be contributing to this diminished reproductive essence and hormonal imbalance. Understand what foods should be avoided. *Refer to the notes on inflammatory foods in the chapter on diet for more information. Consider a cleanse to kickstart this learning process. I recommend Mediclear from Thorne Research to my patients.
- Assisted reproductive technology - Especially if age is a factor, this is a diagnosis where I encourage considering IVF sooner than later, if it is an option. As stated above, if IVF is being considered, preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is a new advancement that may play a key role in success.
- Qigong - An ancient Chinese form of exercise involving soft movement and meditative breathing. Used for the cultivation of deep health, longevity. This is one of the few ways the Chinese believe one can reverse diminishing reproductive essence.
- Perseverance - The single most important quality one can possess when faced with odds such as this. Do not give up.

NOTE: *DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone) supplementation in diminished ovarian reserve (DOR) has been reported to improve pregnancy chances with DOR, and is now utilized by approximately one third of all IVF centers worldwide. Increasing DHEA utilization and publication of a first prospectively randomized trial warranted a systematic review. Current best available evidence suggests that DHEA improves ovarian function, increases pregnancy chances and, by reducing aneuploidy (abnormal chromosomal make up), lowers miscarriage rates. DHEA over time also appears to objectively improve ovarian reserve. Recent animal data support androgens (male hormones) in promoting preantral follicle growth ('sleeping follicles') and reduction in follicle atresia (death). Improvement of egg/embryo quality with DHEA supplementation potentially suggests a new concept of ovarian aging, where **ovarian environments**, but not eggs themselves, age. DHEA may, thus, represent a first agent beneficially affecting aging ovarian environments (Gleicher, 2011). Other agents (foods, supplements, medications, lifestyle interventions) can be expected to show improvement of aging **ovarian environments**. This is precisely what I (and countless colleagues) have always believed that Traditional Chinese Medicine was accomplishing, improving the 'whole' reproductive environment. I look forward to the day science catches up and shows that Chinese herbs and acupuncture have been improving ovarian environments (egg quality) all along!*

Unexplained Infertility:

With unexplained fertility, there are many possibilities. I would say the first goal is to determine where your particular challenges lay. The good news is that by enlisting a doctor of TCM, you have taken the first step. In my experience, this is a condition that responds favorably and quickly with TCM. Together we will find out what is standing between you and a baby. One of the common themes I see with unexplained fertility is emotional. So you might want to set the goal of discovering what your emotions are and if they are negative, what you can do to overcome them. Your goal list might look something like this:

- **Meditation** - Check out the local meditation centres (often Buddhist), read up on the subject and ultimately take 10 minutes a day (or more if you can spare it) of quiet time to sit alone with your thoughts in an attempt to cultivate more peace. This is a practice so have patience with yourself.
- **Fun** - Are you getting enough? When I asked Martha, an absolutely fabulous and vibrant 88 year-old woman in my Qigong class, what is her most profound pearl of wisdom after living such a long life, she responded by saying; 'Don't take life too seriously.' Sometimes it's that simple.
- **Yoga** - Research classes and times that are convenient. In Vancouver where I live, there are more yoga studios than Starbucks. First time drop-ins are usually free, so take some time to find a style and place that you feel is a fit for you.
- **Coaching or Counselling** - Keep a regular appointment with someone you respect and trust that can guide you through this journey.
- **Give back** - Find ways to contribute to your community. Step outside yourself and your circumstance. Volunteer. "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no person can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

- Journal - Buy a beautiful journal and fill it with all of your thoughts. This is a great way to discover what's going on for you. It is also a great way to dispose of the garbage and self-defeat floating in your mind.

Thin Uterine Lining:

One of the major causes of infertility and IVF failure is a thin uterine lining and inadequate blood flow to the uterus. Treatment to increase blood flow is essential to improving fertility and reducing chances of miscarriage. It should be noted that stress, lack of exercise, not enough rest, lack of joy and certain foods can inhibit blood flow to the uterus and ovaries. The following are effective treatments for a thin uterine lining.

- Acupuncture - Proven effective via observation with Doppler ultrasound by researchers from Sweden (Stener-Victorin, 1996 & 2003) for increasing blood flow to the reproductive organs. In my clinical experience, acupuncture is extremely effective for the management of thin uterine lining.
- Diet - Avoid sour food when bleeding (yogurt, vinegar, pickles, grapefruit, currants, green apples, etc.) Consume more blood invigorating foods when bleeding (fish, ginger, cinnamon, turmeric). Post menstruation, eat blood nourishing foods (eggs, carrots, spinach, dates, goji berries).
- Castor Oil packs - Recommended at night in conjunction with foot soaks (see Step Eight).
- Sleep - You need a minimum of seven restful hours of sleep to recharge your body and allow for optimal repair and growth to take place.
- Exercise - Mild cardio, yoga and brisk walking will help with optimal blood circulation.
- Vitamin D & Fish oils - Both of these supplements are important when a woman's lining is thin. For more information, refer to Step 5.

Endometriosis:

In the case of Endometriosis, our primary goals (to enhance fertility) are balancing hormone levels and reducing inflammation surrounding the ovaries and uterus, as well as reducing pain. To date, exact mechanisms underlying Endometriosis are still up for debate. There is still much one can do to manage pain and create a healthier environment for the reproductive organs.

- Visceral manipulation - A properly trained massage therapist may be able to aid in the softening or healing of pelvic adhesions caused by Endometriosis.
- Indole 3 Carbinol, Magnesium, & N-Acetylcysteine - These as well as other supplements may help the body better manage this condition via hormone regulation, nourishing deficiencies, reducing pain, and limiting or reducing the growth of Endometriosis. See Step Five for more information.
- Acupuncture & Chinese herbal medicine - Extremely effective for the management of menstrual pain associated with Endometriosis.
- Brussels sprouts - Liver health is required to properly convert and eliminate proliferative estrogen, which can be high in women with Endometriosis. Including cruciferous vegetables in your diet such as broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, collards, cauliflower, kale and turnips will aid the liver with this important task.

- Avoid toxins - Many toxins in our environment are known to disrupt hormonal balance and are major contributors to conditions such as Endometriosis. You can read more about this topic in Step Seven.

NOTE: *According to the collaborative on health and the environment and conditions database, PCB's and their cousin PCDD (dioxins) are linked to Endometriosis. The most common sources of human contact are through beef and dairy consumption. It is likely why we have seen massive improvements in women with Endometriosis when they completely eliminate dairy from their diets.*

Pelvic Pain (Vulvodynia):

In addition to infertility, women with pelvic pain can lose interest in sex extremely quickly. It is important to understand when your fertile time is. The body naturally adjusts to be more accommodating to sex during your fertile times. In the days leading up to ovulation, cervical fluid should increase helping with lubrication, and the cervix should soften and retract upwards into the vagina creating an environment that is comfortable for penetration. If the pain is unbearable, sex should be kept exclusively to this time of your cycle. Developing relaxation techniques (deep breathing, visualization) prior to and during sexual activity will also help.

- Counselling - If there is a past event that may be contributing to this, it is essential that it be addressed.
- Feeling fertile - Know when you are fertile (prior to ovulation), as sex is most often much more comfortable at this time of the menstrual cycle.
- Avoid cold drinks and cold food - May increase cytokine activity, which increases pain response and intensity.
- Physiotherapy - Assessment and treatment is sometimes quite useful. Find a professional who specializes in the pelvic floor.
- Muscle relaxation - Learn to relax your muscles, both the pelvic floor as well as those that carry tension from everyday life such as your shoulders, hips and jaw.

Recurrent Pregnancy Loss:

"I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish that He didn't trust me so much." ~Mother Teresa

With women that have suffered from pregnancy loss, addressing the needs of the spirit is always a primary principle of treatment. The emotions of sadness and anger that accompany this loss and the fear attached to trying again, sometimes seem insurmountable. Medical causes for the loss must also be understood when possible, then addressed if treatment exists. Regulation of the immune system and ensuring proper blood circulation are imperative in the treatment protocol. TCM is a very effective treatment option for soothing emotions, balancing hormones, promoting blood circulation and regulation of the immune system—all important aspects that may be involved in a large percentage of miscarriages. There is also evidence that if IVF is being considered, preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is a new advancement that may play a key role in preventing miscarriage. Though costly, I encourage learning more about this chromosomal screening technology to see if it is right for you. Other recommendations are:

- Counselling/coaching - Counselling to help deal with the pain associated with the loss and coaching to help you get back on your feet, reduce fear and once again move toward your goal.
- Yoga - Great for the body mind and spirit. Helps improve posture and eliminate any structural issues that may be contributing to improper physical function of reproductive organs.
- Coffee and alcohol - Eliminate. These have both been associated with increased risk of elevated homocysteine levels and miscarriage.
- Homocysteine - Elevated homocysteine levels* may contribute to miscarriage. Adding supplements and eating foods high in B6, B9 (folic acid - specifically 5-MTHF), and B12 help regulate homocysteine.
- Avoid stress - Especially when pregnant, do everything in your power to avoid stress. Stress reduces nutrition and blood flow to the developing embryo.

NOTE: *A study of 238 women undergoing IVF treatment showed those who received acupuncture had significantly less first trimester miscarriages when compared to the women that did not receive acupuncture (Khorram, 2012).*

** Homocysteine: increased homocysteine levels are associated with inflammation of blood vessels and the reduction of blood flow to surrounding tissues (i.e., uterus).*

Pregnancy loss. Unburden your Heart

By Dr. Erin Flynn

Trying to get pregnant after a miscarriage is an emotional journey. If a woman has suffered several miscarriages, the journey has taken a toll on both her body and her spirit. Often, questions of why and how are being asked – is it because of my egg quality? Is there a genetic incompatibility? Is there something wrong with my uterus? What about immunological or blood clotting factors? Endocrine or thyroid reasons? Am I really “unexplainable”?

As Chinese Medicine doctors, we are asking the same questions. But the wording and the ideas we use are a little different – how nourished is your Kidney Yin? How is your Kidney Yang functioning? What does your constitution indicate about your Jing and your Qi? What is the condition of your Blood – are there any signs of stagnation, deficiency, or heat? Are there any indications of dampness or phlegm, and if so are there also Heat signs? What is happening at a more holistic level with your sleep, digestion, thirst, energy, body temperature? Any aches and pains?

And there is one more very important factor which also needs to be assessed. It is sometimes overlooked - how is your Heart handling the ups and the downs of your pregnancies and your losses? Have you put up an emotional shield of self-defence so that you do not feel the pain? Do tears fall frequently and uncontrollably? How is your emotional stability during the day, and are you having any bad dreams? Have you acknowledged and grieved for your loss? Have you

accepted the experience that you've had, and are you open and ready to invite a new experience in? Are you able to forgive yourself? Can you surrender to the process?

In biomedicine, we talk about the HPO Axis (the Hypothalamus – Pituitary – Ovarian Axis). This refers to the hormonal interconnection between the brain and the reproductive organs. Stress, anxiety and strong emotions are known to disrupt this cycle, often manifesting as menstrual and fertility difficulties. This is the Mind-Body connection.

In Chinese Medicine, we talk about the communication between the Heart and the Kidneys as being similar to the HPO Axis. Let's face it – miscarriage is a heart-breaking experience. And your Heart needs to heal from it so that healthy, fertile communication with your Kidneys can resume. Emotional numbness, uncontrollable crying, depression and nightmares can be indicators of a Heart energy not in balance.

Sometimes the energy of the Heart can be brought back into balance by simply acknowledging how sad it is to lose a pregnancy, and by having a good cry with someone you trust. Spending time in nature where the energy of life surrounds you can be therapeutic. Sometimes we can use certain acupuncture points on the Heart, Pericardium and Liver meridians to help restore and ground Heart energy. There are Chinese Herbal Formulas we can use to help nourish and clear the Heart. And some women will really benefit from seeing a Therapist or Clinical Counsellor who has experience working with reproductive health related challenges.

So as you are trying to make sense of your journey thus far, and what can be done to help you reach your goals, remember to consider your spirit as much as you are considering your ovaries, uterus, endocrine and immune systems. Strive to maintain a well-functioning HPO Axis. Open the communication between your Heart and your Kidneys. Check in and connect to your own Heart.

Stress and Emotions:

This is truly where TCM shines! The relaxation and improvement in overall well-being reported in clients undergoing regular acupuncture treatments is extraordinary. From a strictly traditional Chinese medical perspective, it is essential to determine the precise characteristics of the presenting 'stress', since each requires a unique treatment. Therefore it is important to define your stress. It has become a 'catch all' term for any physical or mental-emotional extreme (i.e., marathons, surgery, work pressure, anxiety, depression, etc.) and this raises a point which I need to be absolutely clear about: the stress associated with infertility may be one of the most profound emotional strains a woman will ever experience, and it will manifest in various ways for different women. Talking to someone during this trying time to identify specific areas of stress and its manifestations is a healthy way to strategize solutions.

- Pressure points - Learn and use pressure points known to relieve stress and anxiety. This is effective and easy. (see Step Eight)
- Sleep - When times are tough, take control of the few things you actually have control over. Get enough quality sleep so your body can best handle the assault that results from

excess stress.

- Nurture healthy friendships - This is particularly important for women. If you have withdrawn from your girlfriends then it is time to put a little social time back into your calendar. Whether they offer a compassionate ear or just a fun distraction, they are definitely worthwhile.
- Breathing - Tie a string around your finger, seriously. I wear a ring every day of my life that is meant to do nothing else but remind me to breathe. Make it a reminder to slow down and take a deep breath. Incorporate deep breathing into an aspect of your life that you do regularly so that it becomes programmed at an instinctual level with practice. This will change the course of your health for the rest of your life. I deep breathe together with every client with every acupuncture needle I insert. This induces relaxation and creates a connection to potentiate its healing effects. This ensures I take many deep breaths with every week that passes. Find something that works for you (i.e., each time you wash your hands or open a door) and install this ritual.
- Exercise - The stress-relieving chemicals released through exercise are unparalleled. When we are most stressed is usually when we feel paralyzed, but the opposite is what is needed to feel relaxed, happy and whole again.

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Support:

When a woman decides to embark upon Assisted Reproductive Technologies such as In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), it can be assumed that the fertility journey has already been substantial.

When I support a woman or couple preparing for or going through IVF, a heavy focus is placed on the improvement of patient experience by regulating emotions and reducing stress.

Acupuncture is used extensively for the promotion of blood circulation through the reproductive organs to improve ovarian and uterine response to IVF medications. This is also a primary focus of treatment. It is important to choose complementary treatment options that are sustainable for you and choices you can realistically implement for the weeks or months leading up to retrieval and embryo transfer (see Step Eight). The following are a few simple choices we recommend:

- Guided relaxation/meditation - These can be fertility specific or just stress relieving. Anji online, Circle + Bloom, Dan Gibson, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and Deepak Chopra are just a few you could try.
- Castor oil packs, femoral massage, & foot soaks - Create a new nightly routine. These three practices encourage blood flow to your reproductive organs.
- Pressure points for stress relief - Applying pressure or massage to specific points on the body can help combat the effects of stress.
- Sleep - The importance of sleep cannot be overstated. This is when the body gets a chance to regenerate and nourish itself. Make getting enough quality sleep a priority.
- Reducing workload - When we are not 25 but want our body to act this way, we must give ourselves the time required to nurture oneself, to slow down and conserve vital energy and focus for reproduction.
- Acupuncture - A burgeoning body of evidence displays the benefits of using acupuncture in conjunction with IVF cycles, both in the weeks prior and on embryo transfer day (see Step Nine for references).

Obesity:

If you are overweight, above all else, this is the area that should be tended to. The time is now to make the commitment to the lasting change required to lose weight. Often losing just a few pounds, or dropping your BMI (Body Mass Index) just a couple points is enough to get you to your goal. Do all the research you can and find all the help you need to make this happen. It is well known and accepted that being overweight or obese drastically reduces your chances of falling pregnant and carrying a healthy pregnancy to term. Quite possibly the most important element behind your success is having the proper support around you; do not underestimate the powers of your peer group*. Please refer to the exercise below and make the changes necessary with the company that you keep. Start today.

TCM can help reduce insulin resistance, regulate appetite, and encourage lipolysis (the breakdown of fat) which will help the body to lose weight and result in improved ovarian function and egg quality, translating into greater success rates both naturally and with IVF.

Since your weight management is largely in your control, you CAN do it, and it is simply choices and willpower that are needed to surmount the daunting task of weight loss. Perseverance, commitment and proper medical management is absolutely required.

- Diet - So important we gave it its own chapter.
- Move - It's that simple. Sometimes it might be better to not call it exercise. Physical activity is key, raising your heart rate, sweating, and possibly most important enjoying yourself. Aerobic target heart range is optimal for fat burning.
- Willpower - The ingredient of the recipe that holds the rest together. Coaching, public accountability and Chinese herbal medicine are all fantastic tools to utilize when needing to cultivate willpower.
- Portions - There may be many reasons for the obesity epidemic, but the only action that breeds obesity is the overeating of empty calorie foods. First of all, if necessary, reduce meal portion sizes.
- Why - The element which trumps willpower, is the reason. If your 'why' is strong enough, you'll find any way possible to achieve your goal. Keep yourself focused on losing weight and its correlation with having a family.

Exercise

** Support System: One of the most important things you can do to ensure you accomplish your goals and fulfill your dreams is to develop a support system. It is well accepted that we become very much like the five people we spend the most time with. Take a second to list these people here:*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now ask yourself, are these people providing the support and inspiration you need to ensure you are constantly motivated to be moving toward your goals, to avoid self-sabotaging choices, to grow into the new you and write your new story? If the answer is no, then what I have to say is simple; choose different people to spend your time with. This could be key to unlocking your true fertility potential.

Thyroid Conditions:

The reason it is so important that the thyroid is healthy before conception is that the demands on the gland increase with pregnancy. The thyroid gland regulates metabolism and if it is already deficient then this increased strain may result in inadequate vital functions associated with the thyroid, often ending in miscarriage. The liver is required for the conversion of thyroid hormone and estrogen into a form that the body can use and eliminate. If the liver function is poor then proliferative estrogen is allowed to accumulate in the body lending itself to the growth of ovarian cysts, fibroids, endometriosis and reproductive cancers. Reproductive-related conditions that seem to increase the incidence of thyroid issues include: insulin resistance, PCOS and estrogen spikes caused by environment, medication or birth control pills.

- **Liver cleanse:** *A large percentage of thyroid hormone conversion into a usable form by the body is done by the liver. Liver health is also imperative for the proper conversion of many other hormones important to reproductive health. See the diet section on recommendations for liver health and avoid alcohol and other stressors on your liver.*
- **Gut flora:** *Sufficient gut flora, or the friendly bacteria found in probiotics, is necessary to convert thyroid hormones so they are usable by the body. I recommend taking non-dairy probiotics that are in an acid resistant capsule. Do not sacrifice quality when it comes to probiotic supplements.*
- **Thyroid Peroxidase antibodies (TPO):** *90% of hypothyroid cases in North America are estimated to be due to Hashimoto's, an autoimmune disorder involving the destruction of the thyroid. Keep your immune system and overall health in shape by taking your Vitamin D, probiotics and fish oils. Ask your doctor to run Anti-TPO blood work to see if you have an autoimmune thyroid issue.*
- **Gluten & casein:** *The protein in gluten that the immune system attacks when people are sensitive to gluten is chemically similar to TPO. So when gluten sensitive or celiac women eat wheat or other gluten containing grains, the activation of the immune systems attack on both the gluten protein and TPO is increased. It is also said that casein, a protein in dairy, also may cause the same issue. Therefore, women with Hashimoto's disease should eliminate dairy and gluten completely from their diet.*
- **Iodine supplementation:** *Use caution with iodine supplements as they could increase inflammatory damage done to the thyroid if the hypothyroid condition is actually Hashimoto's autoimmune thyroiditis. Iodine increases the production of the TPO enzyme that stimulates thyroid function, which under normal hypothyroid conditions is beneficial, but since the immune system is actually attacking the TPO enzymes in Hashimoto's, increasing the amount of TPO by supplementing with iodine could increase the immune response and cause even more inflammation and destruction to the thyroid tissue via immune attack.*

Setting attainable goals will keep you on track and restore a sense of control. During a time that can feel like so much is out of your hands, achieving the smallest of goals is often a much needed boost of empowerment. Small, simple commitments over time create the changes we desire in life.

“Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle.”~T.H. Thompson and John Watson

Story

Sally P.

“After two years of trying unsuccessfully to have a baby, I knew something was wrong. My periods had always been very irregular and I was frustrated because my family doctor would not refer me to a fertility specialist until we’d been trying for at least two years.

Finally, we were referred to the Pacific Centre for Reproductive Medicine (PCRM) and started on Clomid. After four cycles without success, I wanted to get more aggressive with our treatments since we are not getting any younger. I came across a Yinstill brochure in the waiting room at PCRM and made an appointment. I had seen two acupuncturists before meeting the Yinstill team. One, for my migraines was helpful, but the second who focused on fertility, made me feel awful about not being able to conceive. When I would tell her how much she was hurting me, she would actually tell me that if I wanted a baby, I had to suffer. I felt discouraged and guilty. I felt like it was my fault we couldn’t have a baby because I couldn’t handle the suffering and pain. I thought there was something wrong with me-- that I was the problem. I was severely depressed at the time and had to take a leave of absence from work.

In spite of my bad experience with my previous acupuncturist, I was willing to try again with someone new. Luckily, Dr. Pentland was encouraging, extremely understanding and supportive. I felt like he really cared about me instead of seeing me as just another patient. I always enjoyed going into the clinic; it was a time for me to relax rather than feeling like I was going in for medical treatments. Spence made me feel confident and hopeful again and my husband and I truly believe that the treatments I received from Yinstill helped us on our journey to parenthood. I am forever grateful to Spence and Harris for not only the treatments but also their kindness and support throughout.

When I met Spence, we had just started our first IVF and I was feeling hopeful for the first time. Our treatment plan was to help my body work harmoniously with all the fertility drugs. The first round of IVF was not a success and I saw Spence sporadically after that but then I decided to get serious and do everything I could to make it work. I started going regularly once a week and also had a transfer day session with Spence. Sadly, that cycle didn’t work either. By our third and final IVF though, I was going religiously twice a week and had a transfer day session. I was also more conscious of what I was eating. I ate healthier and more regularly and took some more time off work so I could be as relaxed as possible for the big day. It worked and I became pregnant!

Throughout our whole journey, seeing friends get pregnant and have kids was definitely painful. I felt like I was letting my husband down. I hated my body for not cooperating and doing what a woman is supposed to be able to do naturally. It was a lonely journey because at that point, we were still very private about our struggles and there was no other couple we knew of that were going through the same thing. I felt that life was very unfair to us, we are good people and we did not deserve this. The pain of seeing friends get pregnant and have children did not disappear until we got pregnant ourselves. There were good and bad days but overall, I think our struggles with fertility have brought my husband and I closer together. If we can survive this, we can survive anything, even raising a child!

My treatment at the clinic with Spence and Harris made me more hopeful and less negative. I knew that we were doing everything we could to make it work and if it didn't, we had tried our best and that's all we can ever do.

Our son was born in July 2013. Even after I was pregnant, I continued to see Spence and Harris for my morning sickness. I would receive emails from both of them from time to time to check in and see how we were doing. I am a huge proponent of TCM and would recommend anyone trying to conceive to go see Spence. There are no immediate plans for us to have more children but if we change our mind, I would not hesitate to go back to Yinstill.

I can't describe what it is like to be a parent to our amazing miracle baby. I tear up thinking how much we've always loved him, before he even existed. It was a very difficult journey to get here but we would do it all over again to have him. Watching him learn new things every day is a gift and seeing him smile when he sees us is just incredible."

Distraction

Learning this simple principle changed my life. It really made me become clear on exactly what it is I need to be doing with each and every moment of every day so that I ensure the accomplishment of my goals and dreams and live a happy fulfilled life. This simple principle is to avoid distraction. We are bombarded with distractions, from social media, email, television, shopping, and other peoples' agendas are just the tip of the iceberg. We live in a society where we pride ourselves on being busy. If you ask 10 people today how they are doing, I would guess that at least eight of them will mention how busy they are in their response. Five of those eight may admit that they are busy being distracted, actually doing very little to deeply fulfill themselves and live the life they want to live. This is not their fault, as most people have not been taught how to sit down and take the time to get crystal clear on the way they want to feel, the things they want, and to create a vision for their future. Getting clear is the first step to success. Set precise detailed goals today. The second is prioritizing the skills, character, and tasks that are necessary to accomplish your goals. Then finally and most importantly, get rid of all the distractions in your life. This means everything that is not a part of your list of priorities has to be eliminated or delegated. This is a pearl of wisdom exemplified by many successful people. I also want to emphasize that focusing your life in such a way sets you up to become an expert in whatever it is you prioritize, but it also means that you have to leave the notion that you can be great at many things behind. This notion is one of childhood dreams and is responsible for

keeping people on the path to mediocrity. You are extraordinary; let your light shine.

“Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never have enough.” ~Oprah Winfrey

Do not underestimate the power of gratitude. It is a natural law that being grateful for what you have will attract more abundance. When you are grateful it is impossible to be angry or scared; try it. Make sure you thank the divine each day for the baby that you will soon be blessed with.

“Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.” ~Native American prayer

Chapter Task:

List your top three health related goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write down any questions you still have about goal setting:

Now go and find answers to these questions!

[Purchase the full length copy of BEING FERTILE' for only \\$2.97 - Click here](#)

Step Three

Self-Monitoring

"When we're willing to listen to our bodies and begin trusting ourselves as much as we trust outer authorities, all the rules change. And so does our biology. Statistics no longer apply to us. We enter the realm of miracles and undreamed-of possibilities." ~Dr. Christiane Northrup, author of Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom

I had a favorite old Chinese teacher during my TCM studies that imparted simple but wise words to us. He said, "Your body is your best friend, listen to what it is telling you!" That is the premise of self-monitoring and fundamental to working together with your TCM doctor.

In this step, we will discuss what to look for and what it means.

At most clinics, like Yinstill, new patients are asked to fill out an intake questionnaire so it is helpful for you to have observed yourself thoroughly. As treatment continues, tracking changes as you get healthier will help treatment continue on an effective path.

No one has a better knowledge of your body and what is going on with it than you. If you pay attention, your body will tell you everything you ever wanted to know. *If* you pay attention.

Some things to watch:

Menstrual cycle

One of the most important things to understand as a woman, particularly when you are trying to conceive a child, is your monthly cycle. Ovulation can and should be carefully tracked in order to know exactly when the ideal timing to have intercourse is. But beyond that, your period and vaginal discharge can tell you a lot about what is going on with your body. By tracking the color, consistency, pain and PMS symptoms you will be able to give your doctor a full picture of your health. Rich, red blood indicates that it is well oxygenated and full of nutrients indicating a healthy environment for an egg to implant. Many women view their periods as an inconvenience or maybe even something they dread every month, yet they are truly a gift. They cleanse your body every month and give you valuable information about what is going on inside.

Ideally, a woman's cycle should be of moderate volume for 2-4 days then taper off for 1-3 days. Blood should be fresh looking in color with minimal brown and black or extreme brightness. It should be neither too thick or too watery in consistency and contain minimal clotting or tissue.

The most common complaints I see fall under the category of Qi and Blood blockage, which acupuncture is typically very effective for. After addressing the primary complaints I hear,

including stress, tension and irritability, I address clotted menstrual blood. This is a symptom that is closely connected to fertility and as you can see in the statistics below, very common.

Top menstrual symptoms reported at Yinstill:

- 95% - clotted menstrual blood (38% small, 47% medium, 16% large)
- 78% - stress
- 74% - neck / shoulder tension
- 69% - PMS cramps
- 66% - PMS breast tenderness
- 64% - PMS bloating
- 61% - PMS moodiness
- 58% - irritability/impatience

Menarche (onset of menses)

According to TCM, and in my clinical experience, menarche starting at 14 years of age or older often seems to indicate a reproductive essence deficiency (Kidney Yin / Yang), especially if having difficulty conceiving. Conversely, the onset of menses too early in life (the age of 10 or earlier) shows possible involvement of environmental causes of hormone imbalance, and from a TCM perspective, excessive heat. So ideally, a woman's cycle should commence around the age of 11-13.

Cycle length (based on an average of 28 days)

Typically, a woman's cycle should consistently fall between days 26-32 every month (that said, slightly longer cycles can be quite normal and fertile for many women). If your cycle varies from this, it is one of the first things to get on track for optimal fertility. Don't worry if you're not there yet though. A combination of diet (as detailed in Step Five), acupuncture and exercise will make a difference and maximize your chances of conception.

So that you can cross reference your symptoms with the Diet and TCM chapters, here is a brief summary of what your cycle may be telling you.

Always early (less than 26 day cycle)

This is caused by an overall deficiency of the body known as Qi deficiency, an accumulation of Heat (possible inflammation), or poor blood circulation causing blockage known as Blood Stasis.

Always late (more than 32 day cycle)

May indicate a deficiency or blockage caused by ineffective digestion and poor production of blood (blood deficiency). This is often accompanied by poor circulation of blood and body fluids known as Blood Stasis and/or Dampness.

Irregular (a combination of early and late)

Irregular cycles are often a result of extreme emotions also known as Qi stagnation. It can also be caused by an overall imbalance of health or lifestyle which causes irregular nourishment to the reproductive organs, manifesting as a body with disorganized cycles. Multiple TCM patterns are often involved.

Blood

Volume

Most women observe this by the number of days they bleed and thus the type/amount of tampons or pads they use. The usual amount of blood loss per period is 10 to 35 ml. Each soaked normal-sized tampon or pad holds a teaspoon (5ml) of blood. That means it is normal to soak one to seven normal-sized pads or tampons (“sanitary products”) in a whole period (<http://cemcor.ubc.ca>).

A heavy flow shows an overall deficiency of the body (Qi Deficiency), and/or accumulation of heat (possible inflammation).

When periods are very light, it most often points toward ineffective digestion and poor production of blood (Blood Deficiency), and/or poor circulation of blood and body fluids causing blockage (Blood Stasis, Cold and/or Dampness).

Colour

In general, menstrual blood should not be purple, brown or black as these all denote poor circulation of blood and body fluids and cause blockage (Blood Stasis, Cold and/or Dampness). Very dark red or extremely bright red blood often points toward accumulation of Heat (possible inflammation). Diluted pink or pale blood most often implies poor production of blood (blood deficiency).

Consistency

Thick blood is due to accumulation of Heat (possible inflammation). Thin watery blood is due to an overall deficiency of the body (Qi Deficiency) and poor production of blood (Blood Deficiency). Clotted blood is most often due to emotional circumstances (Qi Stagnation) and/or poor circulation of blood and body fluids causing blockage (Blood Stasis, Cold and/or Dampness).

Pain

Ideally, a woman’s cycle should not have any pain but most often there is slight cramping both before and during the first couple days of a woman’s period. This is considered normal but pain before or during menses is almost always due to poor blood circulation causing blockage (Blood Stasis from various causes). Pain around ovulation denotes poor circulation of body fluids causing blockage (accumulation of Dampness).

PMS

As a rule, a woman's premenstrual phase should not bear symptoms that drastically affect her quality of life. From a TCM perspective, almost all premenstrual symptoms have their root in Qi stagnation, which often has emotional causes at its root. Being overly emotional, breast tenderness, bloating, nausea and headaches can all be regulated, at least to some degree by ensuring smooth flow of Qi in the body.

Cervical Fluid (vaginal discharge)

By paying attention to your discharge, you will have a much clearer understanding of when you are ovulating. The body gives clear signs that this event is most likely taking place, though the only true measure of ovulation is pregnancy.

Approximately 10-16 days before the onset of menstrual bleeding, a woman's cervix (the opening to her uterus) will open to allow sperm through. When this happens, it produces a translucent, slippery and stretchy fluid that is an ideal medium for sperm to swim in. It also changes the acidity or alkalinity (pH) of the vagina, and contains nutrition for the sperm in order to sustain them on their long journey toward the fallopian tube where they court the egg. Think of the cervix as being in charge for creating the mood for romance.

Checking your cervical fluid is easy; no need for any tools other than your fingers and eyes. You can start monitoring once your monthly bleeding has stopped. After you have observed your body for a couple of cycles, pre-ovulation fluid will be obvious. Here is what you are looking for:

1. A slippery consistency. This provides natural lubrication for intercourse. Some women report a wet sensation.
2. A transparent appearance that resembles raw egg-whites. This is due to higher water content which makes swimming easier for sperm.
3. The fluid should stretch when examined between the fingers and not appear tacky like lotion. The lotion-like cervical fluid is too dense for sperm to swim in.

For some women, examining discharge is very easy, since there is plenty to observe on her underwear. For others, it may be necessary to insert a finger into the vagina to check if smaller amounts are present around the cervix.

Fertile pre-ovulation fluid is over 90% water and not only looks and feels like semen, but is its best friend on the long journey toward penetration of the egg. A few reasons for this include:

Lubrication. Glycerol amounts increase during sexual excitement and around ovulation. This is thought to be responsible for the lubricating qualities that define these important reproductive events.

Vaginal pH. Reducing the acidity of the vagina helps sperm survive, which is a natural occurrence around ovulation. High acidity kills sperm and other invaders, which is very

beneficial, except when ovulating and trying to conceive. Pre-ovulatory cervical fluid lowers vaginal pH. If this does not happen naturally; lubricants like Pre-seed will help.

Swimming. It is easier to swim in water than lotion. The consistency of this fluid is much more conducive to motility.

Food. Sperm needs to eat. Components in the pre-ovulatory cervical fluid such as calcium, sodium, potassium, glucose, amino acids, zinc, copper, iron, manganese, & selenium, give the sperm what it needs to thrive.

Healthy pre-ovulatory cervical fluid is a very important part of the fertility equation. The interaction of sperm and cervical fluid must be harmonious for success with conception. In many cases, women are not producing adequate amounts if any, but fortunately that can be remedied in the following ways:

1. Use Pre-Seed sperm friendly lubricant. Currently, it is the only lubricant on the market proven to mimic the composition and functions of a woman's natural fertile cervical fluid.
2. Drink lots of water with lemon and/or coconut water.
3. Use Traditional Chinese Medicine and acupuncture to help restore balance to body fluid levels.

LH Ovulation Strips for Tracking Fertility

The LH Ovulation Strip is a urine test that is fast and easy. It is used to predict when you are having your luteinizing hormone (LH) surge. Since it is one of the most reliable predictors of ovulation, it is my recommended method when determining the fertile window of the menstrual cycle. Some new ovulation urine strips are also measuring estrogen hormone levels, which is not necessary for the purpose of trying to conceive.

These strips are perfect for timing intercourse as they produce a positive result 12-36 hours before ovulation. They can also help verify a lack of ovulation.

It used to be that the most common way of monitoring your fertile days was to chart your basal body temperature. This involved taking your temperature every morning before getting out of bed and observing its fluctuations. A dip, then spike in temperature meant you had probably ovulated. Unfortunately, there were a few shortcomings with this method. First, there are other factors that can cause a temperature spike such as stress, fever, poor sleep, alcohol consumption etc. More importantly, the temperature spike usually occurs 12-24 hours *after* you ovulate, making it too late for intercourse by the time a temperature change is detected.

You are actually considered to be at peak fertility in the two days preceding ovulation, which is why you may have noticed your body producing the fertile cervical mucus before this. Sperm can survive inside your body for about 3-5 days, so having intercourse in these two days before egg release can make for the best chances of having sperm and egg meet. After being released, an egg lives for about 6-24 hours, after which it will dissolve if it isn't fertilized. So if you are

getting your important indicator 6-24 hours after the fact, as with basal temperature monitoring, you've missed the window.

When your egg is mature and it produces a sufficient rise in estrogen levels, your pituitary gland is triggered to release a surge of luteinizing hormone (LH). This tells your body it's ready to ovulate. The increased LH (as measured on the LH ovulation urine test strips) triggers the release of the egg, which occurs about 12-36 hours after the surge. Since nothing other than impending ovulation triggers an LH surge, this method provides a clear message that your most fertile days have arrived.

Although using the LH ovulation strip is a great way of finding out when your best chance of conception may be, having regular sex (i.e., a few times per week or every other day) mid-cycle maximizes your chances of conception.

NOTE: *When purchasing these tests, please look further than your local drugstore as the price of ovulation test strips is unbelievably high. There are less expensive sources (for example, at Yinstill, we buy them in bulk so we can sell for a reduced rate).*

If you want to learn more about the ways your body displays its reproductive health, have a look at [Taking Charge of Your Fertility](#) by Toni Weschler. It goes into great depth regarding basal body temperature charting and cervical positioning.

Bowel Movements

As embarrassing as this is for some people to talk about, it is one of the central indicators to a deeper understanding of what is happening for you internally. Your bowels are an expression of health, mainly digestive, but also may be great indicators of other underlying problems that should be investigated. What comes out dictates pretty clearly what's going on inside. So before you flush, take a peek!

The Bristol Stool Scale is a system created to standardize the appearance of stool so that reporting to your physician is easier.

So, what is normal? According to TCM:

- 1-2 bowel movements per day is average.
- Without extreme urgency or incontinence.
- Formed, not loose or dry bitty rabbit pellet stool.
- Easy to pass (no grunting!).
- No burning sensation.
- No pain.
- Not too foul smelling.
- No undigested food should be seen.
- No 'unfinished feeling' post movement.
- If they float they are fabulous and filled with fibre.
- Colored like a fawn (depending on what you've eaten).
- No sense of fatigue post movement.

- Should not see any oily residue floating on water in toilet.

If there is blood, it should be monitored to determine what the source is; fresh blood on toilet paper or in the toilet water around an otherwise normal looking stool is most often not cause for alarm, however blood from further back in the digestive tract will produce dark tarry stool, which could be as simple as an ulcer or something more serious. In any case, if there is blood, please consult your physician.

Sleep Patterns

There are a few areas that I have strong opinions on and this is one of them. Sleep is when your body nourishes itself. During deep rest is when the body has a chance to pay attention to the systems that might not take priority in a busy day. The reproductive system gets a shot at optimal nutrition and oxygen delivery that might be redirected elsewhere during stressful waking hours so make it a priority to get enough sleep.

Digestion

Since your body knows best, how you feel after a meal will tell you a lot about which foods are good for you, and foods which you might be sensitive or allergic to. Fatigue, gassiness and bloating may be some signs that your food choices aren't working for you whereas energy and vitality are signs that you should keep up the good work. Digestive issues can also be an indicator of stress so if you feel like you've been eating well but your digestion is still not optimal, you may want to consider slowing down and looking at the big picture. If you are not getting extraordinary nutrition from food, how can you expect your body to flourish?

Moods

Moods can be just that sometimes but, more often than not, if you take a minute to assess what got you into the mood you're in, it can be a good indicator as to what's going on around you that may need your attention. Conversely, a positive mood can let you know that the company you're keeping, your exercise routine or the way you spent your day is nourishing you.

Basal Body Temperature (BBT)

If your cycle is irregular, tracking basal body temperature (BBT) will allow for a better idea of what is going on internally but it is not my favorite way to predict ovulation since temperature range varies for individuals and can indicate not just fertility but thyroid or progesterone deficiencies, coldness or heat. The stress caused by taking ones temperature first thing every morning may outweigh the benefits of the information obtained. You be the judge. If waking every day and turning away from your partner to take your temperature is something you want to do then that is great; we can utilize this information. But if not, then please, unless your practitioner specifically believes that it is necessary, put the thermometer away. Although it is not necessary, many Doctors of TCM use the BBT chart to diagnose whether there is Heat in the follicular phase (day 1 to ovulation), if the body needs help ovulating and whether there are deficiencies in the luteal phase (ovulation to menstruation) that require supplementing. In my

practice, I rely more on other feedback that the body gives us to determine direction of treatment and when the woman is ovulating.

If done properly and for an extended period, BBT charting is another indication of ovulation but since the small and not always apparent temperature dip and rise that happens is after your egg is released, it is too late to start trying once you see it. In conjunction with the rise in temperature, your 'fertile' cervical fluid will dry up and your cervix will close as the hope for implantation begins.

Libido

Sex drive can be an indication of everything from ovulation to trouble within one's relationship. Oftentimes the stress of trying to conceive a child will affect your desire to be intimate with your partner and can be rectified by expressing this. Counseling can sometimes be the way to go or it may be as simple as taking the time to enjoy each other's company without focusing on reproduction.

There are 3-5 days of a woman's cycle where her libido rises and the cervix softens and retracts higher into the vagina, making sex much more comfortable by accommodating an erect penis.

Food Cravings

What you want and what you need may not align. It is not uncommon in the western world for us to eat when we are overworked or bored and especially when we are emotional. Some people refer to this as 'eating your feelings'. There are theories that suggest we might crave one thing when what we need is something entirely different, so do your best to be mindful of what you *really* want before consuming empty calories. Maybe a hug instead of a chocolate bar? And if that's not available, would a piece of fruit satisfy your desire for a donut? I never recommend deprivation though, so if you're sure you want a piece of cake, then have the cake. Just make sure you enjoy every morsel!

Skin

The largest organ on your body is a great indication of your health so observe it and learn what's up. How does it look and feel? If it's dry, drinking more fluids and eating more juicy fruits and veggies may help. Breaking out? Your body may be telling you it doesn't like what you've been eating or if you've improved your diet recently, it may be releasing old toxins. If your skin is oily, it may be an indication of Dampness or a sign that you're not assimilating nutrients. Yellow or grey? Get some fresh air! Your skin hides nothing so have a look and learn.

Trust your body. Your intuition in combination with your physical symptoms will guide you. And if you're having doubts or questions, that's what your TCM doctor is there for. This is a team effort.

...a little discussion regarding medical testing and self-monitoring

The 10 steps outlined in this book can be used alongside or completely independent of western biomedical care. That said, it is important to understand when it is time to ask your doctor to begin to run basic testing to rule out the obvious, like ensuring the fallopian tubes are clear via HSG (hystero - uterus, salpingo - tubes, gram - image), and whether there is any sperm being ejaculated during orgasm. Once these two tests are done, at least you can take a breath and move forward knowing that sperm is present and that it can get to the egg. When committed for enough time, you can make many changes in your life, overall health and fertility potential. However, blocked tubes and no semen are two conditions that will require western medical intervention.

After these basic tests are done, the second step is to help determine overall fertility potential. This involves the testing of FSH or follicle stimulating hormone (& estrogen), AMH or anti-mullerian hormone, and an AFC or antral follicle count. In my opinion, when these are done together, it gives us the most accurate picture of where a woman stands in her reproductive lifespan.

- ***FSH (& Estrogen)*** - This is the hormone that is sent from the brain early in the menstrual cycle to tell the ovary to grow an egg. When blood tests show that this is elevated (i.e. > 10) then it can be concluded that the ovaries are not responding to this hormonal messaging very well, or the message is somehow not reaching the ovary. Estrogen must be tested in conjunction with FSH as high estrogen levels can artificially suppress FSH making it seem acceptable when it may not actually be the case.
- ***AFC*** - The antral follicle count is an ultrasound that images the ovaries and counts the follicles (fluid filled sacs in the ovaries which contain the eggs). A count of over 10 is great; 5 and above shows a moderate remaining fertility potential, and a count below 5 tells us that there is diminished ovarian reserve.
- ***AMH*** - A hormone produced by the ovaries that contributes to the deeper understanding of fertility potential that remains. Some health conditions reportedly can alter AMH results so this should never be used as a stand-alone test.

Two studies regarding AMH (anti-mullerian hormone) are worth mentioning. A recent study published in the Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism showed a 18% decrease in AMH levels in winter, which directly correlated to serum vitamin D levels, and supplementing with vitamin D prevented this seasonal change (Dennis, 2012). The other AMH study was published in Human Reproduction Oxford Journals and it showed significant changes in AMH levels throughout the menstrual cycle, AMH being at its highest concentrations mid follicular phase, between menses and ovulation (possibly something to consider when deciding when to give blood for your upcoming AMH test).

Story

Michelle K.

“Our fertility journey is a long and difficult one. We started trying naturally in early 2007 when I was 31 years old and my husband was 35. After trying for more than a year, I went to see my family doctor to discuss it with her hoping she would refer me to a specialist, but she told me that nothing could be done as I was not considered infertile until trying for two years. I was really disappointed with her response as I had heard others say that after one year of trying, it is considered to be a problem. At that time, I felt that I was still young and thought that we were not in a great rush to have children so I didn't really research it and continued to try naturally. Two years passed and I had switched doctors, so I went to see him. I told him we had been trying for two years without success. He confirmed that I could have been referred to a specialist after one year. He referred me to my first fertility clinic but our first appointment wasn't until six months later. So we waited.

My blood work was normal (i.e., FSH, TSH, etc.) and I had excellent ovarian reserve. I was sent for a Laparoscopy diagnostic to see if there was anything inside that was a problem. I had to wait another six months for the Laparoscopy as it was covered under MSP. During the Laparoscopy, the doctor found and removed endometriosis so at that point that was considered to be the problem.

In the meantime, my husband was sent for sperm tests and the results showed his count was low. He was also sent for an ultrasound and the results showed that he had bilateral varicoceles. He was scheduled for embolization surgery to remove the varicoceles. The surgery was successful and his sperm quantity improved afterwards.

After we'd both recovered from surgery, we started IUI at end of 2010. We did a total of five IUI's but none of them were successful. All the pregnancy tests were negative. Our doctor was really surprised and thought that I would have gotten pregnant with the IUI's. She then determined that besides endometriosis and the male factor, there was also an unexplained reason for our infertility.

We decided to try IVF/ICSI in the summer of 2011. This time I had high hopes that I would be pregnant after my first IVF. I responded very well to the medications and had 15 follicles with 9 eggs.

The next day while I was waiting for the embryologist to call me to tell me how many eggs had been fertilized, the phone rang and it was my doctor instead. I knew it was not good news. She told me none of my eggs had been fertilized. I was very shocked and disappointed and so was she. She said this was the first time she had seen this.

The embryologist said that the reason for this was because the sperm lacked a mechanism to activate the egg for fertilization and suggested to add Calcium Ionophore to help with the fertilization. She said that there were some studies that used Calcium Ionophore when there was no fertilization with ICSI and results showed that it did help.

We attempted our second IVF in October, and this time I was really stressed, hoping the Calcium Ionophore would help. This time Dr. increased my medication but I didn't respond as well as last

time and had to further increase my medication during injection. This time I only had nine follicles and three eggs. The Calcium Ionophore did help; one egg fertilized and was transferred on day three, however, the pregnancy test was negative.

Our third IVF/ICSI was done in the summer of 2012 at another clinic because our previous clinic's lab was going to be renovated (the clinic closed down in the end) and my doctor told me not to wait. I did have some concerns because I was worried that if this clinic doesn't use Calcium Ionophore then we will have no fertilization again. I voiced my concerns to the new doctor and he said that although he knows Calcium Ionophore helps, there is not much information on it. He suggested I try a cycle of IVF/ICSI and if there was no fertilization, he would offer me a second cycle for free and I would only be responsible for the medication at cost. We both agreed and off we went. I responded really well to medication and had seventeen eggs retrieved, fifteen were mature and five fertilized. I was really surprised and happy with the results. I didn't expect to have so many mature eggs and with five fertilized eggs, it gave me a thirty-three percent of the mature eggs being fertilized. The doctor said it was my best cycle, but for them five fertilized eggs out of fifteen, it was not great. He expected more for someone my age.

I ended up transferring two embryos on day five, reaching the blastocyst stage and even had one to freeze. Unfortunately the pregnancy test was again negative. We did the frozen transfer at the end of 2012 and that was negative as well.

After the failed frozen cycle, I wanted to start a fresh cycle of IVF/ICSI as soon as possible so I did my fourth cycle of IVF/ICSI right after the frozen cycle. For this cycle, we decided to try something new and added acupuncture to our transfer day. Studies showed that acupuncture immediately before and after transfer will increase chances of implantation so we had Dr. Pentland help us with the acupuncture. He was very nice and he had answered all the questions I had so I knew what to expect on that day.

That cycle, I didn't respond very well to medication so I had to increase it. I had a total of seven eggs retrieved with five mature and three fertilized. Although I didn't have as many eggs as last time, there was improvement in the fertilization, sixty-six percent of the mature eggs fertilized this time. I ended up transferring two embryos on day 3. This time they did not make it to day 5 blastocyst stage and I had none to freeze. The pregnancy test was negative as well.

After the failed fourth cycle in February 2013, I was waiting to be emotionally ready to start another cycle. However time was going by; it was the end of the year already and I still felt that I was not ready for another cycle. I was thinking to myself I couldn't continue to sit and do nothing and I remembered after my last failed cycle, Dr. Pentland said that we can discuss how acupuncture and Traditional Chinese medicine could help with my fertility journey, so I contacted him and went in to see him right before Christmas. My Traditional Chinese Medicine Pattern Diagnosis was: Qi & Phlegm stagnation with Spleen deficiency, Dampness accumulation and Heat. My husband was: LR stagnation causing Heat and King fire rising, Dampness accumulation below. Dr. Pentland suggested for us to come in for acupuncture once a week, take herbal medicine and some supplements. He also suggested for us to exercise regularly (now I try to do 30 minutes of exercise 3-5 times a week) and some diet recommendations (we have always eaten pretty healthy with all home cooked whole foods and lots of vegetables and

fruit so we didn't need to make too many dietary changes). He recommended to try this for three to six months before considering going through another IVF cycle.

After a while, we did see some health improvements. I do look forward to our weekly acupuncture treatment as it is very relaxing. We are currently into four to five months of treatment right now and I have decided to start our fifth IVF/ICSI cycle next month. I feel that I am emotionally ready and I feel that after going through treatment with Dr. Pentland for a few months, I know our health is in an optimal state for the next IVF/ICSI plus I feel that I have tried my hardest this time. We went in to see our doctor again and this time he decided to change protocol. He told us because we had had four failed cycles and one failed frozen cycle that our chances this time would be even lower. He said we still need to have hope going into another cycle but to be realistic.

Every time we do an IVF/ICSI there are some improvements and it seems like we are closer to succeeding. I hope that this time we are successful and that my dream of becoming a mother will finally come true."

Chapter Task:

List three ways you will start monitoring yourself now:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write down any questions you still have about self-monitoring:

Now go and find answers to these questions!

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