

## What is Acupuncture?

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is among the oldest continuous practices of medicine in history. The Chinese healing art of acupuncture dates back at least 2,000 years. TCM acknowledges the body's ability to return to its balanced state of health, given the correct conditions. Acupuncture focuses on the cause of the imbalance, which manifests itself as symptoms - rather than addressing the symptoms and leaving the cause untreated. The body is believed to be a self-repairing mechanism and acupuncture is aimed at encouraging this self-healing ability. The TCM view is that "qi" energy (pronounced "chi") flows around the body in channels. If the qi is flowing freely, the body is in a healthy state. In the presence of disease, injury or congenital mechanical irregularities, the energy flow can stagnate. The stimulation of relevant acupuncture points frees this stagnation. Acupuncture includes these techniques...Needling

This treatment involves a series of small pre-sterilised, disposable needles which are used to pierce the skin at locations on the body called trigger points. The needles are usually very thin, almost as thin as a strand of hair, and are inserted anywhere from a fraction of a centimetre to a couple of centimetres.

### Acupressure

This is a healing art in which the therapist uses the fingers to apply pressure on key acupuncture points on the body. The amount of pressure used varies according to the condition and requires trained, sensitive hands. Moxibustion

Moxibustion is the technique in which a dried herb called moxa (mugwort) is burned indirectly above the skin over specific acupuncture points. Moxa burns slowly and provides a penetrating heat that can enter the channels to influence the qi and blood flow. It also removes waste products and reduces muscle spasm and pain. Electro-Acupuncture This technique involves attaching needles to an apparatus which sends variable frequencies of electric current into acupuncture points. This technique is often employed for muscle relaxation, pain reduction and clearing energy flows.

### Does Acupuncture Hurt?

It is important to realise that our only experience with needles is usually with thick hypodermics which are hollow in order to draw or administer fluid. Acupuncture needles, however, are extremely thin. They are inserted quickly and shallowly. People are usually amazed that they feel so little. Only sterile, disposable needles are used. Acupuncture and Sexual and Reproductive Health

A review of existing studies shows that acupuncture is beneficial in:

- Reducing stress, believed to interfere with ovulation and male performance
- Regulating ovulation
- Increasing blood flow to the uterus, and improving endometrial receptivity, thereby impacting implantation

Acupuncture has also been found to benefit women with polycystic ovary syndrome, to improve sperm count and quality, arrest endometriosis, etc. Acupuncture and Stress Stress is an unfortunate result of long-term infertility as well as the emotional rigours of assisted reproductive treatments. Couples undergoing artificial reproductive technology as well as those trying to conceive naturally can all experience different levels of stress. Research has found that stress may lead to the release of stress hormones and influence mechanisms responsible for a normal ovulatory menstrual cycle, as well as exacerbate male infertility. Acupuncture is thought to provide an "excellent alternative for stress reduction in women undergoing infertility treatment".