

ACUPUNCTURE FOR IVF | EXPLAINED

It's all about blood flow!

(1) FOLLICULAR DEVELOPMENT |

6 months before egg retrieval

- Ovarian follicles take nearly 12 months to fully grow and develop before you ovulate. But it is 6 months before ovulation that these follicles begin to acquire their own blood supply and respond to their environment. This means what you're eating, your internal stress levels, environmental toxins (endocrine disruptors) can all play a part in the quality of blood that reaches our follicles.¹
- Although studies are limited at this stage, initial research shows that acupuncture can improve ovarian blood supply and may potentially improve hormone/nutrient delivery to these follicles, increasing egg quality. This is the most important time in your fertility journey as it's a time when we can have the greatest influence on the development of our follicles through healthy nutrition, stress management, toxin elimination and acupuncture.^{2,3,4,5}

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | Start of your cycle, 3 - 6 months before IVF begins

Regularity | Every 1 - 3 weeks, depending on reason for infertility

(2) SPERM PRODUCTION |

3 months before sperm collection

- The research investigating the impact of acupuncture on sperm quality is limited. However, if acupuncture is going to have a positive influence on the process of spermatogenesis then it is recommended that men begin to receive treatment 3 months before the day of sperm collection.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | 3 months before sperm collection.

Regularity | Every 1 - 3 weeks, depending on reason for infertility

(3) RECRUITMENT OF FOLLICLES |

End of cycle before IVF begins

- Follicles are recruited at the end of your luteal phase or in the first few days of your stimulated cycle. Acupuncture during this time may potentially influence the number of follicles and the quality of those follicles by stimulating blood flow to the pelvic cavity.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | 1 week before your IVF cycle starts

Regularity | 1 treatment

(4) ENDOMETRIAL LINING |

start of stimulation phase, at the start of your cycle

- The health of your endometrium is key to a positive pregnancy and starts developing on day 1 of your cycle (the first day of your bleed). During this time, frequent acupuncture treatments are recommended as preliminary research suggests that acupuncture may positively influence endometrial development.⁶

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | Start of your cycle/stimulation phase.

Regularity | Every 3-4 days / 3-4 treatments

(5) FOLLICULAR RESPONSE TO MEDICATION |

start of stimulation phase, at the start of your cycle

- Studies show that follicular development is directly correlated with their blood supply.¹ Good blood supply to a follicle during the ovarian stimulation phase has been associated with a greater likelihood of recovering a mature egg,⁷ higher quality embryo's⁸ and an improved chance of pregnancy.⁹ Poor blood supply can result in a longer stimulation phase being required and fewer eggs being recruited.¹⁰
- Although studies are limited at this stage, initial research shows that acupuncture can improve ovarian blood supply and may potentially improve hormone/nutrient delivery to these follicles, increasing egg quality.^{2,3,4,5}

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | Start of your cycle/stimulation phase.

Regularity | Every 3-4 days.¹¹

(6) FINAL FOLLICULAR & EGG MATURATION |

Between ovulation trigger and egg retrieval

- Good follicular blood flow on the day of the hCG trigger¹² and 36 hours after¹³ has been associated with higher pregnancy rates. Although there has been limited research in this area, preliminary studies demonstrate that acupuncture can increase utero-ovarian blood flow. It is therefore recommended that treatment is received during this time to potentially increase egg maturation.^{14,11}

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | Day 10-13

Regularity | Once

(7) PAIN RELIEF DURING EGG RETRIEVAL |

Day of egg retrieval

- Acupuncture is a fantastic tool to help relieve pain and inflammation, even during egg retrieval which some women find to be very uncomfortable.¹⁵

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | Before/after egg retrieval.

Regularity | Once (Optional). Only recommended if you have had a painful retrieval procedure in the past.

(8) EMBRYO TRANSFER |

Days 2, 3 or 5 after egg retrieval

- Acupuncture on the day of embryo transfer has become very popular due to recent research indicating that it may have a positive influence on IVF outcomes by helping to: reduce uterine contractions on the day, reduce the stress response, modulate your body's immune response to the embryo and improve live birth rates.^{14,16,17}

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | 24 hours before embryo transfer.

Regularity | Once.

THE 2 WEEK WAIT |

Your 14 day wait to do a pregnancy test, post egg retrieval

- Recent research indicates that acupuncture given during this phase may significantly increase implantation and decrease first trimester miscarriage rates. As this can be an anxious time for patients too, acupuncture can be a great support in calming the mind in preparation for the test date.

IMPLANTATION |

4-8 days post egg retrieval

- A lack of blood flow to the endometrium will prevent it being so receptive to implantation.¹⁸ Acupuncture can therefore be an effective, natural tool at this stage to increase blood supply to the uterus^{2,3,4,5} and potentially positively influencing implantation.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | 4 - 8 and 8 - 12 days post egg retrieval

Regularity | Two treatments during this phase

THE POSITIVE PREGNANCY TEST |

14 - 16 days post egg retrieval

- Doctors are seeking a blood test of beta-hCG levels of > 5 IU/L but you may take a home test before to check. Word of warning - doing a home test before your indicated test date may come up as a false negative!
- Acupuncture is a safe treatment modality in these early stages of pregnancy and may help with feelings of anxiety, nausea, breast tenderness. At this stage, we aim to support embryo development through supplementing material Qi, Blood and Jing (essence).

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

When | After your positive pregnancy test!

Regularity | Weekly during the first trimester.

THE NEGATIVE TEST |

14 - 16 days post egg retrieval

- If your hCG levels haven't risen or the doctors don't believe the pregnancy is viable after the initial 7 week scan - DON'T LOSE HOPE! We can work together with your fertility specialists to help you decipher your next step by assessing what happened in this last cycle.
- Acupuncture may be beneficial in relieving your physical symptoms at this stage, including heavy and painful bleeding. But most importantly, it's ability to support you emotionally by regulating your stress response.

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