

# Natural fertility treatment



Fertility New Zealand is a registered charity supporting people with fertility issues

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Natural fertility treatments offer a fresh approach to issues affecting fertility by gently encouraging the body towards normal healthy functioning without the use of conventional medical intervention. Recent evidence-based research suggests these manual, energetic and nutritive methods of treatment significantly improve the fertility of both men and women. Such treatment options provide benefits including a gentle, cost-effective, and respectful approach that value the relationships and interconnections of body, mind and spirit.

Couples describe the experience of preparing to become parents with natural fertility methods as supportive, informative and empowering. It is very important to understand that the current model of modern scientific medicine is but one map of the human organism - there are other maps or descriptions of the human body which are equally as real and relevant.

The model upon which one map is based cannot be used as criteria for the other. Descriptions and definitions of health can differ tremendously. The 'unexplained' infertility label in modern medicine can have valid causative factors and explanations in other health-care systems.

## How natural fertility treatment works

Natural fertility treatments strengthen and regulate the body towards normal healthy functioning by working gently but powerfully over a period of time to achieve a level of vitality and balance that can rarely be achieved by other methods. The focus of these treatments is on reversing and repairing the state of disharmony that has resulted in current fertility difficulties.

Rather than devising ways of 'bypassing' the core problem by creating temporary hormonal states aimed at one particular cycle, natural fertility treatments work gradually over a number of cycles aiming to regain balance, strengthen and revitalise the body towards enhanced fertility.

Sometimes treatment over 2-3 months can achieve results; in more complex cases ongoing treatment over 4-6 months or longer is required to achieve a successful pregnancy.

### Pre-conception care

Great emphasis is placed on pre-conception healthcare because medical research clearly indicates the state of health of the parents prior to conception is very important for the developing child's entire lifetime. Natural fertility treatments are extremely effective for ensuring the body is in optimum health on all levels in the 3-4 months prior to conception.

Practitioners often identify and resolve pre-existing hindrances to conception during this pre-conception care time. Often low sperm counts or imbalanced hormone levels improve enough for conception to occur thus eliminating the need for further medical intervention. This is why such treatment is best planned for prior to beginning of the journey towards fertility rather than after failed IVF cycles.

### Evolution towards research-based treatments

Natural fertility treatment evolved through a combination of drawing on traditional herbal formulas with references

back to 200BC. Modern biochemical knowledge of herbal substances added to the refinement of traditional wisdom. Layering the profound energetic diagnostic principals of Chinese medicine, along with the use of treatment methods such as acupuncture, has resulted in a comprehensive approach that allows couples to conceive naturally if difficulties arise.

Continued successful clinical results have provided 21st century Chinese medical specialists with evidence-based treatment strategies. This research has demonstrated significantly improved fertility outcomes for both men and women.

### IVF, acupuncture and natural fertility treatment

While many fertility conditions can be helped with natural methods, sometimes the type or depth of the problem is beyond its scope. When this occurs, combining IVF with natural treatments proves to be most beneficial. Acupuncture treatment given during IVF can increase pregnancy rates by as much as 35%. The treatment has benefits for egg growing and embryo replacement. It has also been shown to reduce miscarriage and tubal pregnancy rates, and to improve outcomes for pregnancy.

Some fertility clinics in New Zealand provide a service on site for the researched acupuncture protocols to be used to enhance embryo replacement and improve IVF results.

These research protocols are based purely on acupuncture point functions not individual diagnosis. More comprehensive individualised natural treatments can be provided before, during and after IVF by a network of practitioners throughout New Zealand, at their own clinics. Couples who take advantage of natural treatment, both preparatory to and concurrent with IVF, find they are better prepared physically, mentally and emotionally for the IVF process or other assisted reproductive technologies if they are required.

## Commonly used natural treatment methods

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the most popularised modality of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It comprises comprehensive consultation, tongue and pulse examination before a diagnosis is made, revealing the individual's 'pattern of disharmony' i.e. core imbalances. Acupuncture points are selected based on this pattern and the presenting problems. During treatment very fine disposable needles are inserted under the skin at acupuncture points causing physiological changes within the body.

Acupuncture alters internal patterns that can result in:

- Regulation of hormones and the menstrual cycle;
- Stimulation of ovulation and fertile mucous;
- Increase of blood flow to the uterus and improved uterine lining;
- Lowering of stress hormones thus inducing relaxation;
- Reduction of hostile mucous;
- Resolution of painful conditions;
- Improvement of sperm count, motility and abnormal forms; ►

- Prevention of recurrent miscarriage;
- Modification of autoimmune responses.

Treatments normally take 20–30 minutes. Sensation is elicited from the needles as a tingling or aching and most people find the experience relaxing. Fertility acupuncture typically requires weekly treatments for 6–12 weeks, followed by less frequent visits until conception occurs. In the case of recurrent miscarriage, weekly treatment up to 12 weeks gestation or beyond is strongly recommended to maintain the pregnancy. For practitioners go to [www.acupuncture.org.nz](http://www.acupuncture.org.nz) or [www.fact.net.nz](http://www.fact.net.nz)

### Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicine is the principal method of treatment in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Properly prescribed herbal formulas can be just as effective for inducing ovulation as first line fertility drugs. Today a wide range of herbal medicine is available in health food stores, supermarkets, at pharmacies, online or through multi marketing companies.

Purchases from these outlets do not usually include dealing with a trained herbalist. Most of the herbal formulas required for fertility treatment are complex and require careful diagnosis before use.

It is not wise to self diagnose and administer herbs. A thorough case history and understanding of the diagnosis and dynamics of the case, along with a treatment plan, is what is behind a prescription from a trained herbalist. Always seek professional help and remember needs differ and change.

Modern Chinese medicines used in New Zealand are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in Australia or similar agencies. When prescribed by reputable registered practitioners they are safe, reliable and effective, and are contaminant- and endangered species-free.

### Supplements

Supplements have gained popularity to enhance fertility or reduce common nutrient deficiencies. Supplements may include vitamins, minerals, amino acids, antioxidants, oils and micro-nutrients often deficient in our soils, or other nourishing substances. Many are researched, some are under investigation. Supplements tend to be less problematic to self prescribe – but again, a thorough understanding of a case can identify which are most useful.

High dosages are often required for curative results that occur with fertility problems. The men's supplement Menevit is an example which has proved useful in clinical trials to improve sperm quality and count. Women are strongly advised to take supplements that contain iodine and folic acid several months prior to conception to reduce the chances of birth defects. Some supplements may contain herbs which are not helpful for conception.

When generic supplements do not prove as beneficial as hoped for it may be because ingrained underlying patterns have not been addressed, or the supplement does not match an individual. Generally supplements are most beneficial for improving fertility when they are personalised and used in conjunction with a combination of approaches for example lifestyle changes, herbal medicines and acupuncture.

### Osteopathy

By gently working with the soft tissues, bones, viscera and the cranial rhythm, osteopathy structurally realigns the body. The adage is that 'structure and function are interrelated'. Structurally realigning the pelvis and cranial rhythm in particular resolves a number of issues associated with reduced fertility, including hormonal imbalances.

The consequences of sacral and pelvic dysfunction impact on fertility. Several studies are under way to investigate this further. Those with histories of pelvic pain, especially associated around menstruation, back pain, head, neck or back injury should seek to resolve these issues before pregnancy with a registered osteopath. Osteopaths are government regulated by the HPCAA.

### Naturopathy

Naturopathy detoxifies, de-stresses and provides nourishment through dietary change or vitamin and mineral supplements. Lifestyle and environmental concerns are addressed; for example organic foods free of chemical residues are recommended where possible. Stress reduction strategies are often employed via massage therapy, yoga, relaxation and exercise. Through these methods some problems associated with infertility can be overcome.

### Hypnotherapy

In hypnotherapy, a state of deep relaxation is induced and positive suggestions are absorbed into the unconscious mind. This technique can calm anxiety and fears, as well as boost confidence and optimism.

### Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a system of healing based on the adage that 'like cures like'. Minute dosages of the activating substance are given, often in a single dose, either in tablet or liquid form. A remedy is found that personalises the presenting symptoms with emotional, physical, constitutional, mental and spiritual traits. The shift that occurs in the underlying energetic matrix can help to change long-held patterns or symptoms and help to induce fertility.

### Counselling and contact groups

Specially trained fertility counsellors help individuals or couples to resolve outstanding issues, as well as those that arise along the fertility journey. Reduction of emotional distress has the potential to bring about significant positive physiological change.

Fertility counsellors are available at all fertility clinics and you do not need to be a patient of the clinic to see a counsellor.

Fertility New Zealand has a network of volunteers, many of whom have faced fertility issues themselves and wish to facilitate contact groups, support couples and singles and share what they found helpful. Those who attend contact groups are better informed and have better coping mechanisms.

### Choosing a practitioner

When choosing a practitioner from any modality listed above, be mindful that some will be specialised in working with fertility, while others have little interest or knowledge in this area.

Throughout New Zealand you can access a number of dedicated practitioners with 10–25+ years experience working with fertility issues in the above modalities. The most helpful advice and treatment usually come from the most experienced. These practitioners also recognise the limits of their own methods of treatment and know when further investigation or referral is appropriate. ■

### Recommended reading

*Fertility and Conception: The complete guide to getting pregnant* by Zita West, D.K. ISBN 978-0-7513-3865-2

*The Infertility Cure* by Randine Lewis, Little Brown. ISBN 0-316-15921-2

*Natural Fertility* by Francesca Naish. ISBN 978 186 351 3371

*The Natural way to Better Babies* by Francesca Naish & Janette Roberts, Random House. ISBN 0 09 18135 0

*Conquering Infertility* by Alice Domar. ISBN 014-200-20011

*Healing Mind, Healthy Woman* by Alice Domar & Henry Dreher, Delta Trade Paperbacks, New York. ISBN 0 385 318 94 4

### Useful links

- **Acupuncture** [www.acupuncture.org.nz](http://www.acupuncture.org.nz)
- **Homeopathy** [www.homeopathy.co.nz](http://www.homeopathy.co.nz)
- **Hypnotherapy** [www.nzhypnotherapists.co.nz](http://www.nzhypnotherapists.co.nz)
- **Natural Family Planning** [www.naturalfertility.co.nz](http://www.naturalfertility.co.nz)
- **Naturopathy** [www.naturopath.org.nz](http://www.naturopath.org.nz)
- **Post & Antenatal Distress Support** [www.pnd.org.nz](http://www.pnd.org.nz)

Please note that the information presented in this brochure is intended only as a brief summary. For specific advice on your particular medical situation you should always consult your professional health care provider. Copyright © FertilityNZ 2004. Updated 2017.



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