



# Infertility

## What is infertility?

A couple is considered infertile if they have not achieved pregnancy after having intercourse at least weekly (without contraception) after one year. As we get older physiological changes occur, which make conception more difficult. These days it is not uncommon for couples to attempt pregnancy later in life, which means that the number of couples experiencing infertility is increasing.

## The Chinese medicine approach to tackling infertility

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a comprehensive system representing the body as a holistic balanced mechanism. Energy (also referred to as Qi) flows through the body within a set of meridian pathways and through the Chinese medicine organ system. A whole range of issues can affect how Qi will flow through the body. Emotional stress, physical disease or trauma and a decadent lifestyle all impact on the state of our health. If the body's energy system is compromised by an external influence, this could have a detrimental effect on the internal organ systems. The reproductive system is commonly affected if the Qi flow is disrupted.

### A 'yang' male perspective:

The most common causes of male infertility are low sperm production, lazy sperm, or the blockage of the sperm transport. If there is structural damage to the tubes or the testes causing blockage problems, TCM is quite limited in results that can be achieved. However, if the problem is related to the production process - which could result in a low sperm count or difficulties with the motility (ability to swim when it counts) of sperm, TCM can be very helpful. Also, any libido or erection issues are often successfully treated without the intervention of Western medicine.

A common TCM body pattern for males is Qi deficiency. If someone has endured periods of stress, eaten excessive spicy or rich foods, consumed alcohol or drugs over a long period of time, this will be reflected in the body. Other possible negative influences on the body include hard physical work/training or (believe it or not) excessive sexual activity. The body will constantly try to rebalance the effect of influences as those mentioned above.

The more it has to work at this process the more drained the body will be of its constitutional Qi.

The liver and kidneys in TCM play a key role in storing our essence or constitutional Qi. It is crucial for the Qi to be strong and vibrant to allow healthy sperm play their role in conception. If the energy of the kidneys become weakened and the liver Qi stagnated, the sperm count or sperm quality can be compromised.

Acupuncture can help to stimulate the kidneys and calm the liver. Chinese herbal medicine is also very effective. Herbs taken on a daily basis will create a progressive positive change.

### A 'yin' female perspective:

From a Western and TCM perspective, the female hormonal system is much more complex than the male. The intricate balance between the reproductive hormones allows the menstruation cycle to occur smoothly. If this does not occur, a hormonal imbalance creates irregularities within the cycle, this may delay or decrease the frequency of ovulation; thereby making conception more difficult. Irregularities of the menstruation cycle can be treated very successfully by Chinese medicine.

The liver, according to TCM, plays a crucial role in dispersing Qi, keeping calm and regulating menstruation. Stress, surgery or conditions such as endometriosis are all common things that can affect the liver according to TCM. If the blood and Qi of the liver become stagnated or blocked, often the cycle will be affected. Excessive period pain, migraines or prolonged bleeding are only a few of the difficult symptoms that may be experienced. If this situation carries on for a long period of time, these problems become deeply manifested in the body and require persistent treatment to create a therapeutic change.