

Role of Acupuncture in the Treatment of Female Infertility

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Objective: To review existing scientific rationale and clinical data in the utilization of acupuncture in the treatment of female infertility.

Design: A MEDLINE computer search was performed to identify relevant articles.

Result(s): Although the understanding of acupuncture is based on ancient medical theory, studies have suggested that certain effects of acupuncture are mediated through endogenous opioid peptides in the central nervous system, particularly β -endorphin. Because these neuropeptides influence gonadotropin secretion through their action on GnRH, it is logical to hypothesize that acupuncture may impact on the menstrual cycle through these neuropeptides. Although studies of adequate design, sample size, and appropriate control on the use of acupuncture on ovulation induction are lacking, there is only one prospective randomized controlled study examining the efficacy of acupuncture in patients undergoing IVF. Besides its central effect, the sympathoinhibitory effects of acupuncture may impact on uterine blood flow.

Conclusion(s): Although the definitive role of acupuncture in the treatment of female infertility is yet to be established, its potential impact centrally on the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis and peripherally on the uterus needs to be systemically examined. Prospective randomized controlled studies are needed to evaluate the efficacy of acupuncture in the female fertility treatment. (Fertil Steril® 2002;78:1149-53. ©2002 by American Society for Reproductive Medicine.)

Key Words: Acupuncture, female infertility, in vitro fertilization