

中医治疗不孕症 Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Treatment for Infertility

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Motivation

In modern society, due to the possibility of receiving higher education for both men and women, and the participation of women in the work force, the decision to have children comes mostly later in life.

This presents a new challenge for women who want to have children after they have already advanced in their carrier, statistics show that after 35 years old (W35B is the notation used here after in this article), women have less chances to be pregnant and higher chances of Birth Defect Risk.

The W35B demand is high enough to push the western medicine research for solution, IVF (In-vitro-Fertilisation) is one example of medical technologies that are catered for this demand.

In China, TCM has been a way to help couples wanted to have babies. The classical texts that deal with the Infertility problem are not specially targeted for W35B.

The motivations of this article are to:

- encourage patients to consider TCM as a choice on its own or in combination with IVF for W35B or Infertility in general
- persuade TCM practitioners that TCM can be and is a appropriate solution for W35B and Infertility in general

Hopefully, more future research will be done for Infertility treatment, a combination of IVF and TCM together, only by working together, we could help patients to achieve the goal better, and may be faster.

Definition of Infertility

Within ages where a woman still have periods, when the couple has tried more than 2 years of sexual intercourse, and the woman is not pregnant, in TCM, it is considered as infertility.

Infertility is further subdivided into:

1. **Primary Infertility** (原发性不孕症 (Yuán fā xìng bù yùn zhèng)): if the couple has not used any contraceptive means, have tried for more than two years to have baby, without success.
2. **Secondary Infertility** (继发性不孕症 Jì fā xìng bù yùn zhèng): if the woman has already been pregnant before, after more than 2 years of trying to have baby without success.
3. **Absolute Infertility** 绝对性不孕症 (Juéduì xìng bù yùn zhèng): either the man or the woman has anatomical abnormality in their sexual organs and can not be corrected.
4. **Relative infertility** 相对性不孕症 (Xiāngduì xìng bù yùn zhèng): either the man or the woman or both suffer from some disharmonies, these conditions can be corrected, or enhanced.

Except Absolute Infertility, in all other cases, they are within the scope where TCM can help. TCM has written records dated as far as 11 century before Christ. Dr. Fu Jing Su and his book “Gynaecology from Dr. Fu” (傅青主女科) is a name that is familiar to all Chinese physicians.

Infertility due to what the western medicine described as: functional or partial organic illnesses that lead to infertility are within the scope of this article. Most common causes are: endometriosis, infection of the vagina, pelvic inflammatory disease.

Aetiology

Kidneys keep the essence and in charge of the reproduction, Ren Meridian in charge of the conception, Zhong Meridian is the Sea of Blood, in charge of the menstruation. When a couple, the man and the woman, with abundant essence, a sound combination of Yin and Yang, then a baby can be created.

Any disharmonies found in Chong, Ren Meridians, in Blood, in Qi could lead to Infertility.

1. Kidneys Deficiency

Kidneys house the source of Yin and Yang energy. The physical growth, development and reproduction are based on the Yin and the Yang energy. If there is a deficiency by birth of this energy, or deficiency due to too much sexual activity, or long standing illnesses, or repeated miscarriages, this will then lead to depletion of the Chong and Ren Meridians, might cause Infertility. This includes Kidney Yin, Kidney Yang deficiency, also deficiency heat.

2. Liver Qi stagnation

Liver Qi stagnation often creates disharmonies in Blood and Qi, as well as in Chong and Ren Mai, which lead to infertility.

3. Internal Phlegm and Dampness

Overweigh, too much fatty food could lead to excessive phlegm and dampness, or too much worry, unhealthy food, these injure the Spleen, or excessive Liver Qi that over controls the Spleen, or Kidney Yang deficiency that could not warm the Spleen, Spleen deficiency will lead to improper water transportation, thus turn to Phlegm, Phlegm and Dampness flows downwards to Lower Jiao, stagnate in the Ren and Chong Meridians, Uterus, which then lead to irregular menstruation, and result in Infertility.

4. Stagnation in 胞宫 Bāo gōng (Uterus)

After birth, or after menstruation, if the Blood is not „emptied“ from the body as it should, pathogenic Qi could combine with the remaining Blood, block the Chong and the Ren Meridians and resulted in Infertility.

Modern research shows that sexual intercourse during the period or when there is an infection of the uterus, the women could develop an antibody („anti-semen“) and lead to endometriosis.

Main Characteristics

Symptoms

A couple tries to have baby via the natural sexual intercourse for more than two years without success, provided both parties have normal sexual organs and not suffer from illnesses.

Woman might suffer from irregular menstruation, no period, painful period, painful breast, lower back pain, or vagina discharges.

Gynaecological Tests

During the treatment of Infertility cases, TCM practitioners should suggest the patients to perform the following tests, send the patient back to their House doctors might be the only way to get these tests done if the practitioners are not medical doctors themselves.

Basic tests include: general check up for internal and external sexual organs. To ensure there is no abnormalities.

Specific tests such as the following could be performed based on the Doctors' opinion:

- Ovarian (卵巢 Luǎncháo) function test, body temperature tests, feminine hormones level test, ovarian reserve fertility tests to evaluation of egg quantity and quality.

— 宫腔镜检查 Hysterosalpingogram (HSG) is an X-ray test. It looks at the inside of the uterus and fallopian tubes and the area around them. HSG can check if there are any Fibroids (myomas), polyps, blockage, endometriosis, inflamed fallopian tube.

— 腹腔镜检查 Laparoscopy, Laparoscopy is a surgical procedure that involves insertion of a narrow telescope-like instrument through a small incision in the belly button. This allows visualization of the abdominal and pelvic organs including the area of the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.

- Use CT, MRI to eliminate pituitary disease(垂体病).

TCM Differential Diagnosis

In order to help making a good diagnostics, it is important to ask questions to clarify: menstruation pattern, history of miscarriage, pills history, overweight, illnesses. 暗产 Ànchǎn, miscarriage within first month of pregnancy, or miscarriages after first month of pregnancy.

1. Kidney Qi deficiency

Irregular menstruation, no period, too much or too little bleeding, tiredness, tinnitus, dizziness, lower back pain, excessive urine, pale tongue, thin tongue coating, pulse deep and weak.

2. Kidney Yang deficiency

Delayed period, skipped period, no period, little bleeding, dark Blood, no sex drive, cold in the abdomen, cold in the four extremities, watery, clear vagina discharges, dizziness, tinnitus, cold in the lower back, excessive urine, unformed stool, dark facial complexion, pale tongue, white tongue coating, slow and deep pulse.

3. Kidney Yin deficiency

Early period, or delayed period, massive or little bleeding, bright Blood, thin body shape, pain in the lower back and knees, dizziness, tinnitus, five palm heat, insomnia, lot of dream, red tongue, little coat, thin pulse, fast pulse.

4. Liver Qi Stagnation

Delayed or short periods, massive or little bleeding, dark blood, with clots, pain in the abdomen during period, pain in the breasts during period, depressive, red and dark tongue, tongue with teeth marks, tight pulse.

5. Dampness and Phlegm accumulation

Delayed or no period, overweight, excessive vagina discharges, white and sticky discharges, pale and swollen face, dizziness, tight feeling in the chest, fat and pale tongue, white sticky tongue coat, slippery pulse.

6. Stasis and stagnation in the Uterus (胞宫 Bāo gōng)

Delayed period, little menstrual blood, dark and purple Blood, with clots, painful abdomen during period, the pain might radiate down to the lower back, dark, purple tongue body, with red spots on the edge of the tongue, white coat, tight pulse.

TCM Treatment Principle

The TCM practitioners need to pay attention to the emotional states of the women patients. Women who has undergone the IVF/ ISSI often gone through a swing of emotional states, from uncertainly, before the results are out, sadness when the results are not as expected, extreme happiness when the results are positive. All women who did not made it the first time with IVF did question about their womanhood.

As there is a closed relationship between Infertility and the menstrual cycle, in addition, Kidneys are responsible for the reproduction, strengthen the kidneys, regulate the periods, are the basis for the TCM Infertility treatment.

For deficiency condition, tonify the Zhang Fu, nourish the Blood and Jing, tonify the Chong and the Ren Meridians, for excessive condition, regulate the Qi and the Blood, and eliminate the Phlegm and the Stasis. Avoid using very bitter, very cold and pungent herbs, rather use sweet, warm herbs for the Infertility treatment.

A. Treatment with Chinese Herbs

1. Kidney Qi deficiency

Methods: Tonify Kidney Qi, warm and nourish the Chong and the Ren Meridians.

Prescription: 毓麟珠 Yùlínzhū (景岳全书)

当归 Dāngguī, 川芎 Chuānxiōng, 白芍 Báisháo, 熟地 Shúdì, 人参 Rénsnēn, 茯苓 Fúlíng, 甘草 Gāncǎo, 菟丝子 Túsīzi, 鹿角霜 Lùjiǎoshuāng, 杜仲 Dùzhòng, 川椒 Chuānjiāo, 白术 Báizhú.

Remarks:

This prescription includes the classical prescription 八珍汤 (Bā zhēn tang), tonify the Qi and the Blood, nourish the Chong and the Ren Meridians. 菟丝子 Túsīzi and 杜仲 Dùzhòng tonify the Kidneys and the Liver, regulate the Chong and the Ren Meridians. 鹿角霜 Lùjiǎoshuāng and the 川椒 Chuānjiāo tonify the Kidney Yang. The main function of this prescription is to tonify the Kidneys to produce the 精 Jīng, the prescription also strengthens the Stomach and the Spleen to produce sufficient Qi and Blood.

2. Kidney Yang Deficiency

Methods: warm the Kidneys and Uterus, regulate the Chong and the Ren Meridians.

Prescription: 温胞饮 Wēn bāo yǐn (傅青主女科)

巴戟天 Bajìtiān, 补骨脂 Bǔgǔzhī, 菟丝子 Túsīzi, 肉桂 Ròuguì, 附子 Fùzǐ, 杜仲 Dùzhòng, 白术 Báizhú, 山药 Shānyào, 芡实 Qiànsí, 人参 Rénsnēn.

Remarks:

巴戟天 Bajìtiān, 补骨脂 Bǔgǔzhī, 菟丝子 Túsīzi tonify the Ki Yang, nourish the 精 Jīng, 肉桂 Ròuguì, 附子 Fùzǐ tonify the gate of live, also the Ki Yang, 杜仲 Dùzhòng tonify the Kidneys and relieve lower back pain, 白术 Báizhú, 山药 Shānyào, 芡实 Qiànsí, 人参 Rénsnēn tonify the Spleen and the Kidneys. This prescription strengthens the Ki Yang, warm the Uterus, disperse the Cold, nourish the 精 Jīng. If there is Period pain, add 元胡 Yuánhú, 台乌药 Táiwūyào, 小茴香 Xiǎohuixiāng, 干姜 Gānjiāng, these added herbs warm the Kidneys, move the Qi, and stop pain.

3. Kidney Yin Deficiency

Methods: nourish the Kidneys and benefits the 精 Jīng, regulate the Chong and the Ren Meridians.

Prescription: 养精种玉汤 Yǎng jīng zhǒng yù tāng (傅青主女科)

当归 Dāngguī, 白芍 Báisháo, 熟地 Shúdì, 山萸肉 Shānyúròu.

Remarks:

熟地 Shúdì, 山萸肉 Shānyúròu nourish the Kidney Yin, benefit the Yin and the Blood in general. 当归 Dāngguī, 白芍 Báisháo tonify the Blood, nourish the Liver and regulate the Period. This prescription nourishes the Yin and the Blood, increases the production of 精 Jīng, regulates the Liver, Kidneys, the Ren and the Chong Meridians.

To enhance the tonification effect of the Kidneys and the Liver, the following herbs could be added: 女贞子 Nǚzhēnzi, 旱莲草 Hànlíancǎo, 菟丝子 Túsīzi, 肉苁蓉 Ròucōngróng, 紫河车 Zǐhéché, 枸杞子 Gōuqǐzi, 淮山药 Huáishānyào.

4. Liver Qi Stagnation

Methods: pacify the Liver, resolve the Stagnation, move the Blood and regulate the Period.

Prescription: 开郁种玉汤 Kāiyùzhǒngyùtāng (傅青主女科)

当归 Dāngguī, 白芍 Báisháo, 白术 Báizhú, 茯苓 Fúlíng, 香附 Xiāngfù, 丹皮 Dānpí, 天花粉 Tiānhuāfěn.

Remarks:

当归 Dāngguī, 白芍 Báisháo tonify the Blood, nourish the Liver and regulate the Period. 香附 Xiāngfù moves the Qi, resolves the stagnation and pacify the Liver. 白术 Báizhú, 茯苓 Fúlíng strengthen the Spleen and nourish the Blood. 丹皮 Dānpí cools the Blood, eliminates the stasis, 天花粉 Tiānhuāfěn

nourishes the Yin. This prescription soothes the Liver, regulates the Chong and the Ren Meridians. If there is Period pain and clots in the bleeding, add 枳壳 Zhǐkè, 橘核 Júhé, 海藻 Hǎizǎo.

5. Dampness and Phlegm blockage

Methods: dry the dampness, transform the Phlegm, move the stagnation and regulate the period.

Prescription: 苍附导痰丸 Cāngfùdǎodànwán (叶天士女科)

茯苓 Fúlíng, 半夏 Bàn xià, 陈皮 Chénpí, 甘草 Gāncǎo, 苍术 Cāngzhú, 香附 Xiāngfù, 胆南星 Dǎnnánxīng, 枳壳 Zhǐkè, 神曲 Shénqū, 生姜 Shēngjiāng.

Remarks:

苍术 Cāngzhú strengthens the Spleen, dry the dampness, 香附 Xiāngfù and 枳壳 Zhǐkè move the Qi and transform the Phlegm, 胆南星 Dǎnnánxīng clears Heat and transforms the Phlegm, 生姜 Shēngjiāng harmonises the middle, 神曲 Shénqū digests the food and transforms the Phlegm. The strategy here is to transform the Phlegm, once this is achieved, herbs that strengthen the Spleen and nourish the Blood, regulate the Period can then be added.

If there is delayed or early Period, add 肉桂 Ròuguì, 益母草 Yīmǔcǎo, 蚕砂 Cánshā, 川牛膝 Chuānniúxī, 当归 Dāngguī to warm the Yang, transform the Phlegm, invigorate the Blood and regulate the Period.

6. Blood Stasis in the Uterus

Methods: warm the Uterus, transform the Stasis, invigorate the Blood and regulate the Period.

Prescription: 少腹逐瘀汤 Shǎofùzhúyūtāng (医林改错)

小茴香 Xiǎohuixiāng, 干姜 Gānjiāng, 延胡索 Yánhúsuo, 没药 Mòyào, 当归 Dāngguī, 川芎 Chuānxiōng, 肉桂 Ròuguì, 赤芍 Chìsháo, 蒲黄 Púhuáng, 五灵脂 Wǔlíngzhī.

Remarks:

小茴香 Xiǎohuixiāng, 肉桂 Ròuguì and 干姜 Gānjiāng warm the Meridians, disperse the Cold to help moving the Blood, the rest invigorate the Blood, eliminate the stasis, and stop pain. The prescription also warm the Uterus, regulate the Periods, if the patient is diagnosed with fallopian tubes blocked by scar tissue, add 王补留行 Wángbǔliúxíng, 透骨草 Tòugǔcǎo to invigorate the Blood and free the Luo channels.

B. Treatment with Acupuncture

Basic Prescription:

关元 Guānyuán Ren 4, 归来 Guīlái St 29, 子宫 Zǐgōng Ex 9 Uterus Point, 三阴交 Sānyīnjiāo Sp 6.

Remarks:

关元 Guānyuán Ren 4 is a main point on the Ren Meridian. It is also the meeting point of the three yin Meridians on the feet and the Ren Meridian, this point nourishes the Kidneys Jing, prepare the Uterus with sufficient Qi and Blood, to restore the ability to develop the foetus.

归来 Guīlái St 29 belongs to Stomach Meridian, part of the Yang Ming Meridian, Yang Ming is full of Qi and Blood, this point enhance the Qi and Blood flow to the Uterus via the Yang Ming Meridian. Ex 9 Uterus point is located in the Lower Jiao, it increases the Blood flow to the Uterus. Sp 6 is the meeting point of the three Yin Meridians on the feet, it regulates the Liver, the Kidneys, the Spleen Meridians. If there is Yang or Qi deficiency, application of Moxa is recommended.

Other commonly used points:

Ki 12 大赫 tonify the Kidneys Qi, it regulates the Chong Meridian, with Moxa it warms the Uterus.

Bl 32 次髎, Bl 54 秩边 increase the blood flow to the Uterus.

Additional Points:

If there is Kidney Qi deficiency, add BI 23.
 If there is Kidney Yang deficiency, add Du 4.
 If there is Kidney Yin deficiency, add Ki 3.
 If there is Liver Qi stagnation, add Liver 3, Liver 14.
 If there is Dampness and Phlegm, add Gb 24, St 40.
 If there is Blood stagnation, add Ren 6, BI 17.

Note that when needling BI 32 and BL 54, the direction of the needles should aim towards the vagina, best result is obtained when the patients have the De Qi feeling.

C. Other TCM Methods

1. Ear Acupuncture

Commonly used ear points: 内生殖器 Nèishēngzhìqì, 皮质下 Pízhíxià, 内分泌 Nèifēnmì, 缘中 Yuánzhōng, 肝 Gān, 脾 Pí, 肾 Shèn.

Use short needles 13mm* 0.25, 20-30 minutes, or use permanent needles, Wangbuliuxing seeds are used commonly in China.

2. Moxibustion

Warm Kidney Yang herbs can be used, Move Qi and remove Blood Stasis herbs too, these herbs are prepared in power form, use Ginger slice as a support, with Moxa on the Ren 8, once per day. This method is used in some hospitals in China where manpower is not a problem.

3. Injection

In China, injection of Vitamine B1, B12, or extract of 当归 Dāngguī, 丹参 Dānshēn, 黄芪 Huángqí could be performed on 中极 Zhōngjí Ren 3, 归来 Guīlái St 29, 子宫 Zǐgōng Ex 9 Uterus Point, 次髎 Cìliáo BI 32, 血海 Xuèhǎi Sp 6, 膈俞 Géyú BI 17, 三阴交 Sānyīnjiāo Sp 6. The point of injection should be alternate, 1-2 ml every time, once every two days, 5-10 times constitute one treatment procedure.

Modern Research: western medicine finding

Any abnormality found in the Hypothalamus, pituitary, Ovaries, Uterine axis (子宫轴) could lead to dysfunction of Corpus Luteum, which cause Infertility.

Immune Infertility, Corpus Luteum defect, blockage of the fallopian tubes (scar tissues, with mucus), abnormalities of the Uterus could cause Infertility.

TCM treatment adapted to western Medicine finding

-Dr. 夏光惠 has done a lot of research on Immune Infertility, he concluded that the main causes are: Kidneys deficiency, Blood stasis, Damp Heat, Kidney deficiency being the Ben cause, and Blood stasis and Damp heat being the Biao causes. His own formula: 菟丝子 12g, 山茱萸肉 12g, 枸杞子 12g, 白芍 10g, 女贞子 10g, 山药 10g, 桑寄生 10g, 赤芍 10g, 红花 10g, 益母草 15g, 白花蛇舌草 15g, 生甘草 10g.

The herbs should be taken once per day, stop taking the herbs during the period, three periods consist of one treatment.

- Dr. 唐桂兰 uses 桃红四物汤 variations to treat 35 cases of Infertility due to inflammation of the fallopian tubes, 60% cured, 82% improved the condition.

TCM textbooks hold that Kidneys and Blood deficiencies are the main causes for the Infertility. Liver Qi stagnation and Blood stasis form the second major causes for Infertility.

- TCM treatment for Infertility due to Corpus Luteum has successful pregnancy rates between 84.4 % to 93.8 %, successful deliveries 51.6 % to 59.4 %. According to Dr. 党丽英, Treating Infertility due to insufficient Corpus Luteum with TCM, published in 2002, 安徽中医临床杂志.

- Dr. 吴 based his treatment on pacify the Liver, invigorate Blood, tonify the Kidneys, herbs used: 柴胡 Cháihú, 白芍 Báisháo, 丹参 Dānshēn, 熟地 Shúdì, 枸杞 Gǒuqǐ, 山茱萸 Shānzhūyú, 菟丝子 Túsīzi, 肉苁蓉 Ròucōngróng, 巴戟天 Bājǐtiān, 杜仲 Dùzhōng.

The herbs are chosen depending on pathologies found in patients, be it related to Liver, Kidneys or Spleen. The herbs are taken after the period, 15-20 days, three months constitute one treatment. 84 cases treated with this strategy, with 81.0 % success rate. The result was published in 1997, in 实用中西医结合杂志.

Old Texts

针灸甲乙经：“女子绝子，衄血在内不下，关元主之。”

针灸大成：“女人子宫久冷，不受胎孕，子宫，三阴交，中极。”

Conclusion






Infertility will always be a topic of great interests, as it is a problem related to human reproduction.

For Primary Infertility, Secondary Infertility and Relative Infertility cases, TCM shows good results in the past, now, also will be in the future to help patients conceive their babies.

W35B and the arrival of new technologies, such as IVF, introduce new aspects for TCM practitioners to be taken into account when treating Infertility cases.

To serve the patients better, a new communication channel need to be established, between TCM practitioners and the hospitals, and other western medical practitioners that work with the same patients, this networking structure does not exist for the moment, extra effort is required for such networking, for the independent TCM practitioners, often we do not have the resources and the time to build such networking.

Appendixes

	Methods	Remarks
 05.11.2015 (39 years old)	IVF + TCM	- 1 st pregnancy. - After 3 years of treatment (from 2012 till 2016), 91 sessions with different therapists, got pregnant. - A baby girl was born. - Suffered one miscarriage(暗产 Ànchǎn) and Neurodermitis. - Outstanding disharmonies: Spleen Qi deficiency with Damp heat in the Lower Jiao.
 13.11.2015 (33 years old)	IVF + TCM	- 1 st Pregnancy. - After one year of treatment, 15 sessions, got pregnant. - A baby girl was born. - Suffered from headache, lower back pain. - Outstanding disharmonies: Liver Qi stagnation / Fire, Phlegm.
 12.05.2016 (39 years old)	IVF + TCM	- 2 nd pregnancy. - She started the treatment on the 7 th Jan 2015, already planned the Egg transfer (IVF) on the 14 th Feb 2016. After one and a half year of treatment, 29 sessions in total, got pregnant on the 28. June 2016. A baby girl was born. - Suffered from Endometriosis (Operated in May 2013), first child with IVF born 2014 July. Migraine headache 3-4 times per year. No migraine during the first Pregnancy. - Outstanding disharmonies: Damp Heat in the Lower Jiao, Spleen Qi deficiency.
 07.12.2016 (36 years old)	TCM	- 2 nd pregnancy. - Intend to use IVF if TCM is not working, after 2 months of treatment, got pregnant naturally. - Suffered from back and shoulder pain. - Outstanding disharmonies: Damp and extreme Heat / Fire in the middle Jiao.
 27.03.2017 (42 years old)	TCM	- 1 st pregnancy. - Pregnant after the first treatment, had 5 miscarriages history. - Suffered from neck / shoulder pain due to an accident. - Outstanding disharmonies: Blood / Spleen Deficiency, Liver Qi stagnation.

This appendix selects some patients from my patients' database who came for the Infertility treatment, they include Primary Infertility, Secondary Infertility, Relative Infertility and W35B cases. Some patients rely on TCM only, others have already started with IVF or intended to use IVF after they have started TCM.

TCM treatment enhanced their Ki Qi for most cases, patients who got pregnant have some Bio symptoms eliminated or improved, the underlining disharmonies, required more Ben treatment, might be improved but far from a balanced state in most cases.

These underlining disharmonies include Phlegm Accumulation, Blood Deficiency, Damp Heat, Spleen Deficiency, Fire condition or Liver Qi stagnation.

The mind-set to have children with an enhanced Ki Qi overcome the existing underlining disharmonies, fertility is gained.