

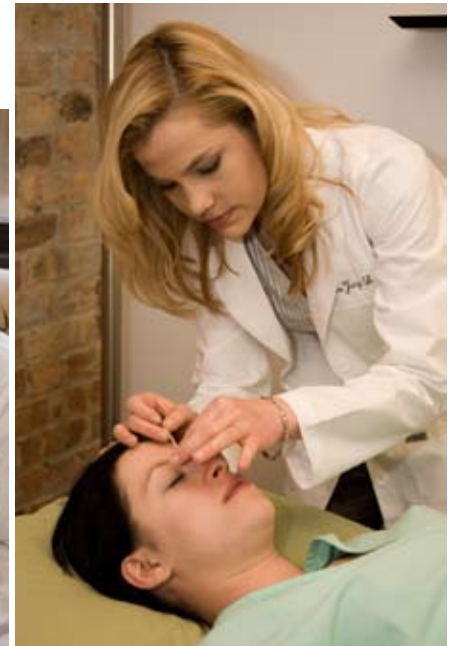
Ancient Wisdom for Modern Problems

Turning to acupuncture to address fertility and anti-aging issues.

By Ivy Gracie • Photography by Jessica DeMuro



Jeanie Lee Bussell (right) consults with a patient, and Caroline Jung (far right) performs acupuncture for a client. Both acupuncturists practice at Tiffani Kim Institute.



When it comes to two of the most significant health issues women face – fertility and anti-aging – most of us arrive beyond fashionably late to the party. We show up around 40 – maybe a little later – only to realize that last call has already been given. And the joke’s on us – we’re left with a dwindling ovarian reserve and multiplying wrinkles. But more and more women are getting the last laugh with the help of acupuncture. Used in the East for thousands of years, acupuncture has proven itself effective as a treatment for both longevity and fertility. Now it’s gaining greater acceptance in the West, and with good reason – it works.

A PRIMER ON ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture falls under the umbrella of Oriental medicine (OM), which also includes herbal medicine, massage, nutritional counseling and exercise. All aspects of OM are based on the philosophy that all living things have a vital energy, called Qi (chee), which flows through meridians – invisible pathways along the body. When the Qi becomes blocked, illness arises.

A blockage is caused by an imbalance in the body. “The guiding principal behind Oriental medicine is balance,” explains Jeanie Bussell, MSOM, LAc and director of acupuncture and Oriental medicine at Tiffani Kim Institute in Chicago. “If there’s cold there should be hot, if there’s warm there should be cool. Too much of one creates an imbalance and the Qi gets stuck. That’s when illness occurs.”

By inserting needles into specified points along the meridians, acupuncture restores the flow of Qi. “Acupuncture goes in, almost like a cop, to start redirecting traffic so that it flows better,” Jeanie explains.

Because illness can be brought on by both internal and external factors, determining the cause of an imbalance requires an in-depth look into a patient’s life. Prior to the first appointment, a patient completes a health history questionnaire that details lifestyle, diet, sleep patterns, stress factors, menstrual cycle and other circumstances that may be influencing the illness. During the initial appointment the acupuncturist will discuss the questionnaire at length with the patient and perform an examination. Once a diagnosis is reached, the acupuncturist will begin the treatment, inserting tiny sterile needles along the meridians that apply to the patient’s condition. Most patients experience a slight prick at insertion, but there is no pain once the needle has been set. Treatment length varies anywhere from a few seconds to over an hour and the frequency of prescribed treatments is determined on a case-by-case basis.

ACUPUNCTURE FOR FERTILITY

“Acupuncture has been used to treat fertility for thousands of years in China,” Jeanie says. “One of the first prescriptions ever written – on a tortoise shell – was a treatment for infertility. Obstetrics and gynecology was one of the most developed aspects of Chinese medicine.”

For those seeking to conceive naturally, acupuncture helps regulate the menstrual cycle to make ovulation more predictable and increase the uterine lining to create a more receptive environment for the embryo. And when combined with prescribed herbal formulas, acupuncture can help secure a fetus to help prevent miscarriage. Treatments are not limited to women, however, and Jeanie raises an interesting point. “In 35-40 percent

of infertile couples, the reason for infertility is a sperm issue. Men should be getting treatments because acupuncture shows an overall increase in sperm quality.”

Acupuncture is also of benefit to patients who are undergoing some kind of assisted reproductive technology like in vitro fertilization, intrauterine insemination, donors or surrogacy. When used in conjunction with these Western techniques, it helps regulate hormones, moderate the side effects of hormone therapy, improve the quality of eggs produced and increase the chances of implantation.

A German study confirmed the efficacy of acupuncture in a 2002 study, which followed 160 women undergoing in vitro fertilization. Eighty of the women received acupuncture treatments 20 minutes before and 20 minutes after fertilized embryos were transferred into their uteruses; the other 80 did not. While women in both groups got pregnant, the rate was determinedly higher in those who received acupuncture – 34 pregnancies versus only 21 in the non-acupuncture group.

Jeanie says it's not uncommon for reproductive endocrinologists to refer patients to acupuncturists to optimize the chances of conception and keep patients encouraged through the challenging process. “It's highly stressful,” she says. “In Western medicine they don't know how to help with the stress aspect of the process. This helps women feel a sense of empowerment; that they're being proactive and taking control over an uncontrollable situation.”

COSMETIC ACUPUNCTURE

For those looking to preserve or recapture their youthful appearance but aren't ready for injections or surgery, cosmetic acupuncture might be the perfect alternative, one that brings results not only to the face but also throughout the entire body. According to Oriental medicine, the strengths and weaknesses of various internal organs are reflected in the face. For that reason, acupuncture can do double duty by addressing health issues as well as beauty concerns.

“You cannot have a good face without a healthy body,” affirms Larisa Turin, OMD, acupuncturist, herbalist and owner of Chicago Acupuncture. “Any issues in the body will manifest on the face. You can't have constipation, poor digestion or poor blood circulation and have good facial color. Everything is connected. We have to treat the whole body to see results in the face.”

While the primary goal of cosmetic

acupuncture may be reducing fine lines, relaxing muscles that cause deeper lines, reducing dark circles and bags under the eyes, and firming the skin, treating other health issues can help support the benefits of facial rejuvenation. By addressing organ function, stress, insomnia and other issues, acupuncture can increase a patient's overall well-being, which ultimately results in healthy skin tone and color, higher energy levels, and a more youthful appearance.

Cosmetic acupuncture is not a facelift; rather, it's a course of treatments designed to bring about gradual improvement of skin condition and tone. “If a patient has sagging skin, acupuncture cannot pull it back,” Larisa says. “But cosmetic surgery cannot change the quality of the skin. If you have pale, dry skin, it will be the same. I can improve the blood circulation to bring more life to the skin.”

A typical protocol calls for twice-a-week treatments for approximately five weeks, but patients often notice immediate changes after the first treatment. And unlike more invasive procedures, the risk/reward ratio is low. “With acupuncture, the worst case scenario is you will have some bruises,” Larisa says. “But you'll have a quicker recovery time and fewer complications. And, unlike Botox, you can still make expressions.”

ACUPUNCTURE FOR LIFE

Unlike Western medicine, which treats conditions only after they've manifested, Oriental medicine takes a proactive approach to cosmetic and general health concerns. “Oriental medicine deals with small issues when they're just starting,” says Larisa. “It's much easier to do it then because it hasn't dug deep roots into the body – it's much easier to get rid of. That's why it's important to start when you see early signs and symptoms.”

Clinically tested, scientifically proven, and gaining increasing acceptance by more and more Western medicine practitioners, acupuncture is offers a natural, effective way for maturing women to approach the inevitable. And thanks to its capacity to treat more than one issue at a time, not only can acupuncture achieve the goal of a healthy pregnancy or a younger look, it can also enhance a patient's overall health and well-being. ■

Chicago Acupuncture is located at 306 West Hubbard Street, 312.399.4919, www.chicagoacupuncture.com. The Tiffani Kim Institute is located at 310 West Superior Street, 2nd floor, 312.260.9020, www.tiffanikiminstitute.com.

(below) Larisa Turin, owner of Chicago Acupuncture, demonstrates one of her procedures on a client.

