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Acupuncture doubles chance of having a baby with IVF, study suggests



Acupuncture could dramatically boost the chances of IVF treatment working, a study suggests.

A British study found that rates of success were twice as high among those having the alternative therapy. Fertility experts said the findings were interesting and statistically significant.

However, they warned that it was unclear whether the apparent benefit stemmed from the traditional Chinese practice - or from a placebo effect, because the women became more relaxed after time was invested in them.

The study by Homerton University Hospital in London, involved 160 couples suffering from fertility problems. Half were assigned to have four sessions of acupuncture during their IVF cycle.

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Dr Adam Balen

One year on, those who underwent the ancient practice, involving fine needles, had achieved pregnancy rates of 46.2 per cent. Among those who had not, pregnancy rates were just 21.7 per cent.

Dr Adam Balen, chairman of the British Fertility Society described the findings as “very interesting”.

He said: “There is no doubt that when people are given acupuncture it can feel like an extra dimension of support. Fertility treatment is stressful and it can be quite helpful to have a therapy which relaxes them.”

He said there was no evidence that the controversial practice - dismissed by critics as “mumbo jumbo” - does any harm to those trying to start a family.

Stuart Lavery, consultant gynaecologist at Hammersmith Hospital, said many women suffering fertility treatment were interested in alternative therapies.

“There is a patient demand and a patient interest in the field of acupuncture and probably in the area of traditional Chinese medicine overall, but the area is sadly lacking in rigorous prospective randomised assessment,” he said.

“This study is interesting in that it does seem to show a statistically significant difference.”

He said it was not clear whether acupuncture had a physiological effect on the body, or whether who underwent the sessions became more relaxed because therapists spent time listening to their problems.