

WELCOME



We are a husband and wife team, a medical doctor and a psychologist, who specialise in treating infertility and improving fertility. The main approaches we use are acupuncture and mindbody medicine.

Both acupuncture and mindbody medicine can increase your chances of getting pregnant and having a baby, whether you are having IVF or not.

acupuncture can double success rates of IVF. Why? Studies have shown changes in hormone regulation, immune function, stress hormones and egg quality. These changes lead to better implantation, fewer miscarriages and more successful pregnancies. Acupuncture may also help women who are not having IVF or those with other problems which disturb fertility, such as endometriosis.

mindbody medicine programmes have been shown to increase pregnancy rates for women having IVF to nearly 50%. They also increase pregnancy rates for women conceiving naturally. As well as increasing your chances of conceiving you will almost certainly find you feel less weepy and sad; you will find you cope better and relationships will improve; you will sleep better and associated stress related problems like IBS and headaches tend to reduce.

We help you with an approach which is tailor made for you using just acupuncture, or mindbody medicine, or a combination of the two.

These treatments may also provide an answer for couples who have tried IVF without success, for people with religious or moral objections to IVF, for people who cannot afford it or for those who just don't want it.

What these treatments can achieve for you.

As a doctor and a psychologist we have a strong scientific background and so we look to the research evidence to give you an idea of what these treatments can do for you, rather than just relying on our ideas and impressions.

- Both acupuncture and mindbody medicine (MBM) have been shown to almost double success rates when used to enhance IVF treatment.
- MBM has also been shown to considerably increase your chance of conceiving naturally, without IVF.
- Acupuncture has been shown to improve hormone balance so that women labelled 'poor outlook' for IVF are upgraded to 'good outlook' thus improving their chances of success.
- Both treatments have been shown to reduce levels of stress hormones such as cortisol. High cortisol levels disturb the GnRH pulse which controls LH/FSH release, and high levels are associated with poor outcomes.
- One of the MBM techniques we use has been shown to increase levels of DHEA. This hormone declines steadily, particularly during your thirties, but it may be important in maintaining egg quality. If you are an 'older' woman this technique may be particularly important for you.
- MBM has been shown to support patients emotionally so that they don't give up IVF before they have completed enough cycles (usually quoted as 3-4) to have a realistic chance of pregnancy. Couples are usually surprised to learn that the stress of treatment, rather than the cost, is the commonest reason for couples dropping out of IVF too quickly.
- Acupuncture has been shown to help men with low sperm counts and poor quality sperm.
- Both MBM and acupuncture have been shown to restore ovulation in women who are not ovulating. Drug treatment to restore ovulation does not always work, and so our approach provides another possibility if you have tried that, or if you don't want drugs, or cannot tolerate them.
- If you become pregnant, acupuncture has been shown to reduce the risk of ectopic pregnancy which would lead to miscarriage and possibly long term tube damage. Acupuncture is also associated with a statistically increased chance of a live birth.
- When you are pregnant, MBM has also been shown to reduce levels of maternal stress, reduce the risk of miscarriage and the risk of a stillbirth. Reducing maternal stress also has a positive effect on the early health of your baby, such as reducing the chance of ADHD and learning difficulties in your child.
- If, sadly, you don't get pregnant, MBM has been shown to lower the risk of depression in women who have not conceived.

Also, it is good to know that these treatments:

- Are non invasive
- Are low stress in themselves as well as lowering stress.
- Are safe, when used by qualified practitioners.
- Have no moral or religious issues.
- As an alternative to IVF these treatments are considerably cheaper than IVF.
- Are a relatively low cost addition to IVF to help to ensure success as quickly as possible whether you are paying yourself, or having free NHS cycles.
- Help to ensure that you don't drop out of IVF too soon due to stress. Stress is the commonest cause of dropping out of IVF - not the cost. Most people need three cycles or more to become pregnant.
- Go on working for some time after treatment ends. After the initial concentrated treatments you just need an occasional top-up to maintain effects over several months.

MINDBODY MEDICINE (MBM)



I'm going into quite a lot of detail about **MBM** because in the UK people usually don't know very much about **MBM**.

The distress of infertility is huge but of course you knew that. Many people who have not been there themselves would be shocked to know that infertility causes similar levels of distress to being diagnosed with a major life-threatening illness or of having someone you love die.

Infertility *treatment* is also distressing. The commonest reason for giving up IVF before you have conceived is not the expense (if you are paying for it) but the distress it causes, although only about 25% of people starting IVF think it is going to be that stressful.

This level of distress is a bad enough experience in emotional terms, but unfortunately stress has physical effects too. Emotional distress, for example, disturbs the GnRH pulse which controls the LH/FSH cycle and may interfere with immune responses, to name but two consequences.

Certain *physical* stressors like having a low BMI (or very high one) or doing too much physical exercise ('too much' in fertility terms can be surprisingly little for some people) may also disturb fertility, especially in conjunction with emotional stress.

MBM addresses issues like these and more. It is so effective because it is a multi-targeted approach. Research shows **MBM** is far more

effective in helping you get pregnant than counselling or relaxation training.

With all this to deal with it will be a relief to know that most people find **MBM** is a surprisingly pleasant and light-hearted experience - and useful in many other situations too.

A multi-targeted approach

One of the first things I do is show you is how to manage those thoughts of sadness and hopelessness which go with repeatedly not getting pregnant. It is vitally important to do this because your repeated negative thoughts may convert into chemical and electrical signals which will affect systems in the body directly linked to conception.

I'm sure people have told you to 'just think positively'. If you could, you would have done it long ago, wouldn't you? But it's surprisingly difficult to do this without help.

MBM shows you effective ways of spotting how and when these thoughts start and how to change them to make them less painful. Getting them under control increases your sense of coping as well as reducing the level of emotional distress you experience.

At an early stage I help you understand the real role of stress in infertility. When people talk about 'stress' they usually just think of emotional stress, such as those sad and negative thoughts, or the emotional stress of going through an IVF cycle. But its not just emotional stress which is a problem, there are other 'stressors' and it is important you

know what these are, and how they all work together to reduce your chances of falling pregnant. This topic was the subject of my recent dissertation for Warwick University, so I feel I can really help you get this straight so that you make the right sort of changes in your life.

It is an absolute must to do a relaxation technique as well. 'Just relax and it will happen' is probably the next thing said by the people who breezily told you to 'think positively'! Again, good advice, but so hard to do. Ways to relax are everywhere but most people simply don't get them right. I will show you, using biofeedback software, a simple technique which really works and has been shown to reduce stress hormones such as cortisol.

This technique also boosts levels of another hormone, DHEA. DHEA tends to fall as we age (ageing in fertility terms is sadly a lot younger than what we generally think of as ageing) but a small pilot study in the States showed that increasing DHEA may improve egg quality. Practising this relaxation technique on a regular basis may help to improve egg quality, by doing it naturally without perhaps the risks associated with synthetic hormones.

MBM is a very practical approach, so if you are having IVF, I will prepare you for the big hurdles of egg collection and embryo transfer and suggest ways to survive the 'two week wait'. The differences between your needs and your partner's needs can cause conflict and distress between couples, and MBM helps you keep in touch with each other if this is a problem.

If you are having acupuncture with us you will be shown a simple way to top up the acupuncture effects between visits, using **MBM**, at home. This cuts down the number of treatment sessions you need.

Who is MBM for?

It benefits people who are OK and people who are struggling.

If you are having IVF/ICSI and are OK:

Many of you who are fine and coping well and have good support from your partner,

family and friends, think you won't need **MBM** as you have no emotional or psychological problems, nor big anxieties about IVF. This is great so you could try a cycle without it and see how you get on.

It is important to point out though, that the research that showed that **MBM** increased success rates with IVF and in spontaneous pregnancies, was in those women who felt they had no psychological problems.

Also, the reality is that IVF very often turns out to be much more difficult than people expect. So whilst only 25% of people going into IVF think they might need support, 60% of the couples who drop out of treatment too quickly do so because of the unexpected degree of stress. This is a problem because couples need to complete several cycles to have a realistic chance of success (the HFEA says this is about 3.1 cycles per pregnancy). By reducing stress **MBM** will help you complete enough cycles to have a good chance of becoming pregnant.

If you are having, or are about to have, IVF/ICSI but are not OK:

if you had emotional and psychological issues before infertility, or if you are depressed, if you feel isolated and without support, or have a lot of stress with your partner, or are very worried about IVF before you start, then you really need help with these issues. Problems like these can really make success rates for IVF plummet - it may be better to delay treatment a while to help you with these problems first, rather than suffer the higher risk of failure by going ahead.

MBM can help you but I would also advise you to talk frankly about how you feel with your IVF provider and also talk to your GP. There may be several things that need to be put in place at once to help you and to give you the best chance of success with IVF.

If you want to conceive naturally

If you don't want IVF, or have tried it and not been successful, then **MBM** will be helpful and has been shown to increase natural pregnancy rates.

ACUPUNCTURE AND ELECTROACUPUNCTURE

Please note that all these comments about acupuncture relate to the way I do acupuncture which is Western Medical or Scientific Acupuncture. This is evidence based and developed from a modern research and understanding of how the body works. Traditional Chinese Acupuncture is very different and some of these ideas may not apply to that system.



There has been a great deal of research into acupuncture and electroacupuncture over the last 20 to 30 years and there is now a strong body of evidence showing what happens in your body when we use these approaches.

Stimulating points or areas on the surface of your body, whether with needles or with electroacupuncture, sends signals to the spinal cord and then to the brain. There are some reflex changes at the spinal cord level which will have an effect on the functioning of the ovaries and uterus (for instance blood

flow is increased which is thought to improve implantation).

The signals to the brain are more important and these lead to changes in an area of the brain known as the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is a major control and processing centre. It helps to regulate hormone and immune function, through pathways influencing the pituitary (which governs the release of the hormones LH and FSH) and the ovaries, and also involving the adrenal glands.

These central effects (ie coming from the brain) include a reduction in sympathetic tone as part of a 'de-stressing effect' and this in turn also improves function at the ovary/uterus level.

Some of these central effects, through neuroimmune pathways, will alter immune responses in the body and this is thought to help reduce the likelihood of rejection and failure of implantation of the embryo.

Some of the effects of acupuncture which have been shown in research (and what they mean for you)

- Improvements in GnRH, LH and estradiol = better hormone regulation and function
- Improvement in conversion of testosterone to estradiol = better hormone control
- Induction of ovulation = can start ovulation in about 80% of women who are not ovulating)
- Improvement in ovarian morphology (appearance and quality) in PCOS = egg quality improves with repeated treatments which makes fertilisation, either naturally or with IVF, more likely

- Improvements in uterine artery blood flow = probably important in improving implantation of the embryo
- Improved immune responses = less likelihood of rejection of embryo and failure of implantation. (May be important in endometriosis-associated infertility)
- Improvements in sperm quality, morphology, and motility = several studies have shown how effective acupuncture can be in making men more fertile.

These alterations all add up to improving your chances of becoming pregnant, whether you are trying 'naturally', or in combination with IVF, or if you have tried IVF and not been successful.

One treatment.....

A single treatment with acupuncture/electroacupuncture just after embryo transfer has been shown to significantly improve the success rates of IVF, and we recommend that all women who are having IVF also have a session of acupuncture at that time.

or several.....?

We know from the effects listed above (which have been demonstrated in research) that if you want to conceive then acupuncture will produce changes that will help you. These effects are not produced by a single session though.

If you are not having IVF at all then a course of several sessions should substantially increase your chances of success.

If you are having IVF then acupuncture/electroacupuncture should also boost your chance of conceiving. However the effects build up gradually. We also know that the effects are long lasting, so the benefits will persist over several or many months, after a course of treatment. The benefits are not limited to a single cycle as with IVF.

Different needs, different ways of helping you

We have successfully treated couples who have not yet started on the IVF route but felt they needed help in the meantime; couples who were undergoing IVF already or were about to start shortly; couples who have tried IVF without success; couples who for financial, religious or ethical reasons do not want IVF at all; couples who have already had a child but find it hard to conceive again (secondary infertility); and couples who have suffered several miscarriages and are struggling to complete a pregnancy.

Are you beginning to think you have a problem and are wondering what you can do to help yourselves before IVF?

If you have been trying for a baby without success for a year, doctors will start to investigate why you have not conceived. You may feel that the only option for you will prove to be IVF.

But, between realising you seem to have a problem and starting IVF, you have a window of opportunity. Don't waste it. Discover what you can do to increase your chances of natural or spontaneous pregnancy and take active steps now before IVF starts. Do this with commitment and urgency in the hopes of avoiding the stress, issues and expense of IVF altogether. Be in no doubt that IVF is stressful for most people; 65% of those who give up IVF do so because it is too stressful. Most infertility specialists will also admit that it isn't very successful, and that success rates haven't changed much in years.

But it is usually possible to improve your chances of natural pregnancy by lifestyle changes coupled with nutritional supplements, mindbody techniques and some acupuncture. For many people this will provide the answer they need. The evidence for these techniques suggests they are far more likely to help you than, for example, early stage conventional medical treatment for infertility, Clomid or IUI.

For years doctors have offered the drug Clomid to try and boost fertility, or IUI (intrauterine insemination) to women as a first step before going on to IVF. But a recent study showed that these two treatment options were no more likely to

lead to pregnancy than doing nothing at all. Fortunately you don't have to do nothing at all as we have explained.

Even if you don't get pregnant on this programme our treatments will ensure you are well prepared to get the most out of IVF if you still have to do it.

Are you already in the middle of an IVF cycle? It's not too late

A single treatment with acupuncture at about the time of Embryo Transfer has been shown to substantially increase the likelihood of success, probably by making implantation more successful. If you are finding it all rather stressful then a session of **MBM** as well may help to take the pressure off you.

Are you about to start an IVF cycle?

A single treatment at the time of Embryo Transfer will be a great help, but research also shows that many of the benefits from acupuncture and **MBM** are cumulative and take a bit of time and several repetitions to get the best effects. So ideally we prefer to start our treatment before you begin your IVF cycle(s) and continue throughout the IVF treatment cycle. This is probably about six or seven treatments in all.

What happens if you don't get pregnant this cycle?

The effects of acupuncture and **MBM** do not finish at the end of an IVF cycle either, but go on working for a time afterwards. If you are not pregnant with this cycle then it may still boost your fertility and may help you conceive naturally between IVF cycles, and help with your next IVF cycle. We suggest

only intermittent top-ups, usually just of acupuncture, once you have done a full treatment cycle with us.

Have you tried IVF and not been successful or don't want IVF at all? Our approach provides another option. Obviously if financial, religious or ethical reasons stop you trying IVF altogether, then acupuncture and mindbody medicine provide the 'natural', or lower cost, alternative.

Have you found that IVF clinics won't take you because they say you are too old?

'Too old' in fertility, and particularly IVF, terms is depressingly young. If you are around forty you may find fertility clinics won't help you. We would not want to give you false hope because fertility is certainly declining at this age but we would expect these approaches to help you make the most of your natural fertility in the hopes that you will still conceive

SECONDARY INFERTILITY

Already have a child, but can't conceive again?

Not being able to have another child (secondary infertility) is more common than primary infertility; about 60% of infertile couples are secondarily infertile. It is extraordinary therefore that, given the numbers of couples involved, secondary infertility is completely underrated by professionals and public alike in terms of the huge distress it causes. It's every bit as bad as primary infertility for the people involved and some researchers say couples with secondary infertility actually suffer more. We never get drawn into value judgements and we do treat secondary infertility every bit as seriously as primary infertility.

Having one child is not a substitute for a second child. It may seem strange to couples with no child at all but that's the case. So couples with secondary infertility are suffering all the desire and longing and sense of incompleteness that couples experience when they have never had a child. On top of that they also experience social and emotional pressures that couples with primary infertility don't experience at all.

This is because society views couples with secondary infertility with suspicion. They are seen as either so concerned with their lifestyle and consumerism that they don't want the expense of another child, or so career conscious that another child would interfere too much with their career advancement. But couples say that if they confide the real reason why they have not had another child, people respond not with compassion and understanding as they would towards a couple with primary infertility, but usually make them feel insufficiently grateful for the child they already have and guilty about their desire for another. Couples comment that they learn very quickly to say nothing rather than be met with this response.

If members of your social group are having second children you begin to feel increasingly left out and alienated. You no longer fit in. A one-child family is not the same as a two-child family. As a result you often feel isolated from your social group which increases your sense of social abandonment and loneliness.

People with primary infertility tend to see you as completely selfish and don't understand your problem at all. As a result you may have felt very unwelcome in infertility support groups which cuts you off from any semi-official support as well.

Professionals rarely do any better; they fail to appreciate the depth of your emotional distress and so may not take it seriously, and in many areas there is no official provision for couples with secondary infertility anyway, so there is limited help even when couples do find a sympathetic ear.

Couples put pressure on themselves too; if you are paying for IVF you may feel guilty about spending money on trying for another pregnancy which you feel perhaps should be spent on the child you have. You may also worry about the time it takes up which is time spent away from your existing child. A single child, when old enough, may also start to apply pressure by asking why they are different from their friends who have brothers and sisters.

There is a mass of literature on infertility in general but secondary infertility is usually relegated to a few paragraphs in those books. When I was researching this particular problem a year or so ago I could only find one book devoted to it and that was out of print!

We have treated a number of women with secondary infertility and helped them a great deal. We provide an understanding ear and never underestimate their distress or their particular problems. This is a sound and supportive basis to work from with the mindbody and acupuncture programme.

And if nothing works.....?

Sadly not everyone gets pregnant despite doing everything possible. Not surprisingly, women tend to become more depressed as time goes by. But **mindbody medicine** still helps because we know from the research that even when women do not conceive, they are less depressed several years after they have 'given up', if they have had **MBM**, than women who have not.

While we are working with you we also get to know you, and you get to know us. This personal approach provides you with support and continuity, both in the clinic and on the phone, at whatever stage you are, and however things are going, whether you are in active treatment with us still or not.

FAQs

I'm afraid of needles, must I have them?

No. I have been using electroacupuncture for more than 20 years in my regular practice for patients who don't want needles, and this works very well. Many of the responses in the body will be exactly the same as using needle acupuncture but no needles at all are used. All you will feel is a gentle buzzing or tingling sensation in the areas being treated. The basis of my fertility treatment is no needle electroacupuncture anyway to which I usually add some needle acupuncture, but you do not need to have needles as well to get the acupuncture effects.

Must I have acupuncture/electroacupuncture and mindbody medicine together?

No, it's not essential. If you want acupuncture on its own, or just mindbody medicine, or even a mixture of your own choice, that's fine with us. We will advise you though, based on the questionnaire we ask you to fill in, and talking to you, but the final decision is of course yours. We like to do both because both treatment approaches are very helpful in boosting fertility, and they probably work in different ways. Each has worthwhile benefits the other doesn't have and also there is some evidence that, done together, they strengthen the effects of each other. So we prefer to do both together as a full programme of roughly 6 treatments over about 3 months. If you do want both approaches then it's much more convenient for you that we can do both at the same treatment session.

How long do the effects last for?

No one has measured how long these effects might last although they do seem to last for some time. Sometimes, some of the markers for improved hormone balance – more regular or less painful periods for example - appear to be lasting. Certainly, from what we know of how acupuncture and mindbody medicine work, the responses could be very long lasting.

Can you treat men?

Yes. Some studies suggest that male factor infertility can affect 30% of couples. Some good research shows that acupuncture can improve sperm quality, quantity and survival. Mindbody medicine may be helpful as well, although we usually just concentrate on acupuncture with men.

How old is too old?

Quite simply we don't know. There is evidence that acupuncture and some of the mindbody techniques that we teach improve the quality and function of the ovaries and one technique in particular will boost DHEA. This naturally occurring hormone seems to "make eggs and ovaries younger". You can learn to improve levels of DHEA with a simple breathing method which we will teach you.

Can it help with endometriosis?

Yes. About 60% of women who have endometriosis will have difficulty conceiving. Both acupuncture and **MBM** can help with the pain of endometriosis, and will also improve hormone function. This improvement in function means an increase in your chances of conceiving, and we have had some success in women with endometriosis.

What about PCOS?

Swedish researchers studied women with PCOS who were not ovulating and showed that electroacupuncture repeated over several weeks stimulated ovulation in a substantial number.

Further research showed that there were improvements in the ovaries and in egg quality and also in insulin resistance.

I am not ovulating, and Clomid isn't working. Can you help?

A study in the USA showed that **MBM** techniques produced ovulation in 80% of women with Functional Hypothalamic Amenorrhoea (failure to ovulate). Other published studies in Acupuncture show similar success rates. But what may be more important is that these two approaches probably have wider, more beneficial effects, than Clomid.

About us - Why we think we can help you

We are specialists in using acupuncture and mindbody medicine for fertility.

We have, over the last five years, studied and trained with some of the world's leading authorities and researchers into the use of acupuncture and mindbody medicine for infertility. Their work guides what we do to ensure you get the best complementary treatment available. Our specialist knowledge in complementary medicine is also built on a sound conventional base.

Most recently (2008-9), we both achieved the internationally prestigious Post Graduate Award in Assisted Reproduction Technology from Warwick University. This Masters level course has given us an in-depth understanding of infertility in general and how it is treated in conventional medicine with drugs and IVF/ICSI. We feel it is essential to understand what is going on generally in IVF and not to just be knowledgeable about our own treatments. Not only does this ensure that complementary treatment is tailored to do the most good at the best time but it also ensures there is no possibility of interfering with your IVF if you are having it.



Michael qualified as a doctor from St Mary's Hospital (now part of Imperial College), University of London. When he was working at St Thomas' Hospital, London, he became interested in musculo-skeletal medicine and is one of the few doctors to complete a special osteopathic course for doctors and work full time in the field. He quickly added acupuncture to his range of treatments and left the NHS to work full time in his own private practice offering osteopathy and acupuncture.

Over the last five or so years he has been developing a special interest in the treatment of infertility and gynaecological and antenatal problems using acupuncture and musculo-skeletal techniques.



Sarah has a BSc (Hons) Degree in Psychology and is a Graduate Member of the British Psychological Society. She holds a Diploma in Advanced Hypno-Psychotherapy with Distinction. She has trained in NLP with Dr Richard Bandler and in Cardiac Coherence with Dr Alan Watkins. She trained in mindbody medicine for infertility with Dr Alice Domar at the Boston IVF Centre, Boston, Massachusetts, one of the largest IVF centres in the US where acupuncture and mindbody medicine are routinely used in conjunction with conventional IVF. Dr Domar is a world authority and

leading researcher in her field.

We believe this specialisation is particularly important in the case of infertility where couples are often desperate, on an emotional roller-coaster and all too ready to clutch at straws. Of course all the qualifications in the world would count for nothing if we were not genuinely interested in your problems, and totally committed to helping and supporting you in your desire to have a baby.