

An Integrated Approach to Fertility



By AnnieHambley
15th November 2016

Combining IVF with naturopathy and acupuncture for the best chances of pregnancy

I can clearly remember the exact moment we made one of the biggest decisions of our life and although at the time we knew would be life changing, we still couldn't possibly begin to comprehend the incredible journey we were to embark on, one that would take us through light and dark times and test the strength of our marriage bond and our commitment to a love we wanted to share and evolve.

Lying on a cliff front with my husband in Ibiza, watching the full moon setting with the sounds of drumming in the background we decided we were "ready" to start a family. I had been ready from the moment we had moved in together, something stirred inside me awakening the strong maternal desire to become the mother to his children and although Mark could have settled for one or two more holidays to the sunset ashram, he was certainly just as ready to be a father and so began the adventure towards parenthood, within a few months we would inevitably be pregnant and by the following year we would be watching the sun set with our baby.

So that's where we were in theory, reality however was quite different and like 1 in 6 couples after struggling to conceive naturally for over a year I was diagnosed with unexplained infertility, the unexplained part being that my periods had stopped suddenly following the death of my brother

and no amount of cleansing, shiatsu or counselling had brought them back

them back.

I can remember the day that assisted fertility was mentioned; I was adamant that I wouldn't have any clinical intervention, the holistic naturopath in me that won't even take a paracetamol for a headache held on to the vision of conceiving "naturally", without tablets, timings and certainly not IVF. Not that I knew anything about the process then, infertility

was and still is a taboo subject that causes a sudden sharp intake of breath when mentioned in social situations and although I may have heard about a friend of a friend who had conceived twins following IVF, I was yet to meet such an allusive person.

I did everything I was supposed to do to kick-start my hormones and unblock stagnant energy, but over the months as my optimism and energy decreased my desire for our baby increased and I started to feel completely helpless with a huge sense of guilt and inadequacy. It wasn't until speaking to a friend that been through the process of IVF some years earlier did I start to realise that it was indeed an option. This positive and inspiring lady was a person I had always looked up to and knowing someone who was of a similar belief system to me had been through it helped me slowly start to open up to the idea of assisted conception. Through research I was introduced to an author & fertility specialist by the name of Emma Cannon, who has wrote many essential fertility guides for women, after just one chapter into her book I realised that I had built up infertility and clinical treatment to be a huge and daunting possibility and it didn't need to be, instead of being adamant I could get pregnant without western medicine and feeling like a failure, I just needed to reassess my approach and mind set, rather than feeling anxious and out of control I could combine clinical assisted conception with my natural and holistic philosophy's and become empowered in my own fertility.

We were incredibly lucky from the start that we had an amazing clinical team looking after our care, who did all that they could to support and facilitate our wishes, it was completely person-centred and although there were stages in the treatment that I refused certain procedures, like a rather invasive test which involved having dye blown into my tubes, this was understood and respected and we would move forward without judgement feeling complete trust in the treatment we were receiving. I began seeing a Chinese doctor, who was amazing, she worked in harmony with my medicated fertility cycles and would advise certain practices, food and habits at different points of the month, such as moxibustion, kidney warming, eating lots of sweet potato and having been vegan and then vegetarian I even followed her instructions to have plenty of bowls of chicken soup, I would also not go anywhere without my feet snuggled in a big pair of warm woolly socks, for the Chinese believe that by keeping the feet warm aids circulation, especially to the uterus and I would happily embrace the 45 minutes I did nothing except lie in a peaceful room, listening to relaxing music whilst I had acupuncture. Clinical research has found that receiving acupuncture alongside IVF treatment can increase pregnancy rates by 65%* and although this was still my goal, over the months of regular visits to Dr Zou I had also started to find that the grief that I had been carrying deep inside my stomach since the death of my brother started to lift and with it I had started to experience a new optimism.

This seemed to begin a catalyst of change in my life and although I had believed for years that my diet, outlook and routine was a healthy one, I began to realise that it hadn't and that my restrictive food choices and vigorous exercise regime had left me burnt out and under nourished. I started to exercise not to burn off calories and toxins, but for maintaining a healthy and happy body and mind. My daily yoga practice changed from being something I did just to tone up, into a restorative, energising and mindful practice. I also did something I never dreamt I could do, I opened up and told the world about our struggles to conceive. I knew that this was an experience shared by so many others and those on the whole go

through in silence, only confiding in the people nearest to them, I decided to document our story, an honest tell-all personal experience of infertility and IVF, a blog that not only helped me to write, but that I also hoped would give some comfort to those going through the same thing knowing that they were not alone.

The most important part of this journey, was my partnership with Mark, we shared everything throughout, every worry, stress, excitement, anxiety, hard day, mood swing and glimpses of the future we envisaged with our little one. We supported each other every day no matter what the other was feeling. IVF is still viewed by the majority as a procedure which is hardest for the woman to go through and although like in this case it was me who had been diagnosed as being "the infertile one", it is a definition and journey that affects and includes the both of you equally, you will both share the same suffering and euphoria and it's so important that you work to continue to find the fun and also the strength in your relationship, there will be days that one of you finds it harder than the other and these are the times that your love truly prevails.

Although the first round of IVF was cancelled due to lack of response, we did not lose faith and so booking a break to Cornwall we took some time away in our beautiful little bubble to nurture each other, fill our lungs with restorative sea air and let the magic of the amazing place recharge us ready to return with hearts full of hope. Whilst we were away

we received lots of kind messages of love and support from our friends and family, people that we saw regularly and those we had not seen for years or since our childhood and also people we had never met, but shared our story, all wishing us well, sending prayers, Reiki and affirmations, keeping fingers and toes crossed, sending us all the most incredible positive energy for our miracle baby. I remember being told by my good

friend that our baby was waiting for us and when it was the right time its little spirit would become present, I had always kept this in my mind and as we drove back home I started to have a feeling that this little long awaited spirit was starting to get stronger

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Our next round of IVF was a positive one throughout, I had weekly acupuncture, had little side effects from the hormones, I felt healthy and was eating the best I ever had in my life. We took regular "us time" going for long walks, date nights and massages, we talked about everything that may cause stress or anxiety and put in place coping strategies before they affected us, we laughed a lot and took pleasure in the little things and the time we had together, just us two.

Then the day came when all the love, support, acupuncture needles, fluffy socks, herbs, downward dogs, sweet potatoes, medical research, menopur injections, nursing care and positive energy all came together, in a tiny petri dish and on this one wonderful day our precious spirit decided it was time and the most anticipated little life was created with the help of Eastern & Western Medicine, natural health & science.

I am now in my 5th month of pregnancy, with our beautiful baby boy growing happily inside me and although taking the decision to have IVF was one I never thought I would take and his conception was assisted, this makes it no less natural and a miracle, for we now know more than ever what our love can create ... even if it takes a little help.

Annie is a freelance writer, photographer, lifelong student, yogi, dreamer, wife, homemaker and soon to be first-time mummy to a miracle. Living in beautiful Shropshire countryside, surrounded by rolling hills, she finds simple joys in every day life and firmly believe that this happiness should be embraced and shared.

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