

## Using Acupuncture to help during Pregnancy

Are you newly pregnant and having morning sickness? Or are you further along into your pregnancy and your migraine headaches have kicked back in, and you don't want to take the medication your doctor has prescribed? Acupuncture is a gentle and inexpensive system of healing that has been around for thousands of years (utilized by one quarter of the world's population.) It is a safe therapy to use during pregnancy, and can treat many potential problems that might come up. Being under the care of an acupuncturist is also a nurturing experience, as we will spend time with you, listen carefully to your complaints, and you will leave your session feeling very relaxed. This type of medicine is also useful preventatively in order to help you stay in balance, so that you can have a healthy pregnancy and labor.

A patient of mine named Alice, (not her real name), came to see me for help in getting pregnant. She was 39 and with a recent history of several miscarriages. She was in a very stressful job and had a long commute from home to work, felt fatigued, got a lot of headaches, and was irritable much of the time. In addition to the herbs and acupuncture for enhancing fertility, I also addressed her liver which was stagnant (her Chinese diagnosis was "liver heat, and liver qi stagnation."). She got pregnant after just a few months, and I treated her throughout her pregnancy. Her doctor considered her's a high risk pregnancy. Because of some results that came back from the amniocentesis, he was concerned that she could develop pre-eclampsia with headaches, high blood pressure, fluid retention and rapid weight gain. She came for acupuncture twice a month and had a really healthy pregnancy, even working up until two weeks before her due date.

Acupuncture can be used to relieve a variety of problems including threatened or recurrent miscarriage, morning sickness, anemia, anxiety, constipation, carpal tunnel syndrome, heartburn and other digestive problems, hemorrhoids, insomnia, headaches, sinus problems and

allergies, fatigue, thrush, neck and back pain, sciatica, hypertension, edema, colds and flus.

### **Breech and Posterior Babies**

Perhaps you have heard of friends whose babies were in breech position towards the end of their labor, and were concerned that the baby was not turning. They were considering the possibility of needing a C- Section. Breech and posterior babies are routinely treated with a therapy called moxabustion, a gentle warming treatment used daily at home on a point on the little toe. Research from Italy showed that this technique can have a significant effect in helping to turn breech babies. (*Caedini F, Weixin H. (1998). Moxabustion for correction of breech presentation". Journal American Medical Association. 280: 1580-1584.*) The ideal time for this treatment would be week 34-36, but I have successfully used it later as well. (There needs to be room for the baby to turn.) I also recommend a posture similar to "child's pose" from yoga that the mother can gently hold for up to 10 minutes a few times during the day.

### **Labor Preparation**

Many patients come 3 to 4 weeks before due date to receive treatments to prepare the pelvis and cervix for labour. It is done once a week until delivery. This improves the mother's health and energy and will shorten the labour. A New Zealand Study with midwives indicated a reduction in women needing medical intervention, including medical induction and C- Section. (*Betts D Lenox S (2006) Acupuncture for Prebirth Treatment: An Observational Study of it use in Midwifery Practice. Medical Acupuncture. Vo 17 No 3*). This also a good time to instruct your patient about how to have her partner or doula use acupressure during the labor and delivery, in order to reduce pain and stress, and to keep the process moving along.

### **Induction for a Late Due Date**

This is a gentle approach, using points on the lower leg, hand, and lower back, often with low level electricity, which will help increase contractions, and in most cases, starting up labor without the use of drugs. Sometimes it

takes 2 or 3 treatments to get the contractions strong enough, and it is well worth trying if you are facing a date when your doctor wants to start induction.

### **Acupuncture During Labor**

Some hospitals have acupuncturists on staff that are available to assist you during labor. You might choose to use this if your baby is posterior, if labor is not progressing or contractions have stopped, or severe low back pain.

### **Post-Partum Care**

Many women come back after the birth, to help heal and regain their strength after the birth, rebuild the blood with diet, herbs and moxabustion, to help with insufficient milk production, mastitis (breast infection), post-partum depression, fatigue, insomnia, or healing after surgery.

*(Thank you to photographer Cedar Bough for the beautiful photo of my niece Abigail, taken two weeks before her due date with her second daughter.)*

About the author:

Molly Amelia Greacen, Licensed Acupuncturist and Herbalist, Dipl Ac, CH, is a graduate of the New England School of Acupuncture, and has practiced in Boulder, Colorado for 28 years. She specializes in women's health care, infertility, pregnancy and post-partum care, menopause and gynecology. You can find more articles on infertility, pregnancy, and postpartum care on her website [www.womanmedicine.com](http://www.womanmedicine.com).