



Infertile couples turn to acupuncturists for help

By Molly Bennett

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"When are you going to have kids?"

The all-too-common question may seem simple enough to most, but for a couple who can't have kids, it may not be. Brian and Jamie Rees were such a couple.

"We had no answers," said Jamie Rees.

Two years after their marriage in 1997, the Kaysville couple decided they were ready to have a baby. But they never could get pregnant. They didn't know why.

Once her friends started having babies, Rees said she started to feel the pressure.

"Then it was hard," she said. People would say to the couple that they should have kids.

"I'm trying, thank you" was Rees' response. She said she was always honest about their situation.

The couple tried in vitro twice, artificial insemination and had signed up for adoption classes. Four years and \$20,000 later, the couple was still just that — a couple.

Rees said in vitro was the most emotional part.

"I had to give myself a shot in the stomach," Rees said, "and had to have patches on me."

She said the second time in vitro didn't work was more difficult because of the physical pain, having to pay so much money and then waiting to find out it didn't work.

"I was so mad," Rees said.

The couple was running out of options.

"You get to the point where you think, I will do anything to have a baby," she said.

In 2003, Rees heard about a woman taking herbal supplements for infertility. Rees mentioned it to her chiropractor, and he suggested that Rees try acupuncture.

"I was really at the end of my rope," Rees said. "I was willing to try pretty much anything."

Her husband, Brian, was

skeptical.

"She wanted to try one last thing," Brian said. "I said it wouldn't hurt."

And it didn't.

At her first acupuncture appointment, Rees said she remembered thinking it was strange. She glanced at her body with pins sticking out of it as she lay on the table at the doctor's office. She quickly laid her head back down.

"Strange but very relaxing," she said.

According to Dr. Marshall Hai Ding, the only strange thing about acupuncture for infertility is that it has taken so long to catch on in the United States.

"About three years ago, acupuncture to assist in infertility became very popular," said Ding, who has two Chinese Health Clinics in Utah.

In 2005, a German study on acupuncture's effect on fertility was reported on TV. It showed that women who received acupuncture, in addition to Western medicine, were 50 percent more likely to become pregnant.

"Do you know where acupuncture comes from? . . . Why do you listen to Germans?" Ding said. "It's from China. Acupuncture is about 4,000 years old."

But Ding does agree with the German study result. Of the 100 or more women he has helped with infertility problems at his clinic in the past three years, roughly 60 to 70 have become pregnant, he said.

"But, in America this is the last thing people try," said Ding, who was born and raised in China.

At least that was true for Jamie Rees. She started acupuncture sessions once a week for a month. Then she

went less often but consistently.

"It's hard to get excited and trust anything when what Western medicine says should work doesn't work," Rees said. "And you are heartbroken over it — it's hard to believe in anything."

According to a medical journal essay by Dr. Joseph M. Helms, a patient's attitude toward acupuncture usually does not affect the result. In "Essentials of Complementary and Alternative Medicine," Helms wrote that acupuncture's effectiveness isn't tied to a person's belief in it.

Four months after she started acupuncture, Rees became pregnant.

"We were just amazed," Rees said.

Rees said she tried three home-pregnancy tests — just to be certain. "They were all positive."

Jamie and Brian Rees are now believers. Their family of four will soon be five. Rees received acupuncture before her second pregnancy, but it wasn't necessary for her current pregnancy.

Ding explained how acupuncture works:

"Just like a computer, TV or car runs on certain voltage, human beings have a voltage, an energy called a qi (see accompanying article)," Ding said.

Ding said qi is the electric energy of an organism. "That is something that Western medicine has no clue. They try to deny it," he said.

For an organ to function properly, Ding said, the qi must flow properly — that is what acupuncture facilitates.

The medical director at the Utah Center of Reproductive Medicine, Dr. Harry Hataska, said when the German acupuncture study was reported three years ago, the





center decided to monitor about 16 acupuncturists to see what effect acupuncture had on fertility.

It wasn't a formal study, but the results showed few of the women became pregnant.

"Our experience has been poor," Hatasaka said, adding that the acupuncture seemed to have no real benefit with infertility.

However, Hatasaka added that the women who finally tried acupuncture were usually the least likely to become pregnant with any type of assisted reproductive technique (ART).

Several studies say that acupuncture can increase blood flow to the uterus, increase sperm count in males and reduce stress. However, Hatasaka said, the latest studies on the effects of acupuncture on fertility, presented to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, were not promising.

Hatasaka doesn't discourage its use, though. "It's calming, relaxing, good for fertility."

Dr. Sharon Francel-Peeler of Layton is frustrated with the practitioners of Western medicine who only ask: "What does the research say?"

"They don't take into account the different factors that Eastern medicine considers," said Francel-Peeler, who has practiced acupuncture for five years.

A woman's lifestyle, diet and mental state may affect her fertility and these factors have a lot to do with the overall success of acupuncture for infertile women.

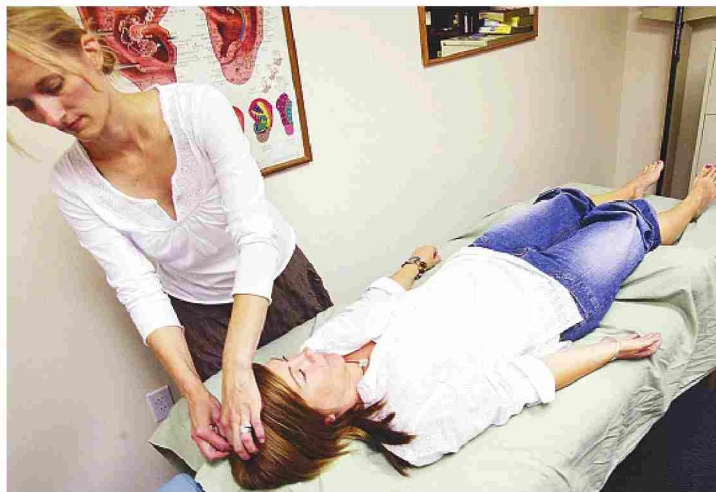
Also, Ding pointed out, acupuncture will not help patients with structural damage, for example, to the uterus or fallopian tubes or override effects of scar tissue.

If a woman is considering acupuncture, Ding and Francel-Peeler both sug-

gested that she check the credentials of the practitioner.

Prospective patients can check nccaom.org to see if the acupuncturist is certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

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Sharon Francel-Peeler, a licensed acupuncturist, applies a needle to the scalp of Stephanie Jones, who is hoping to get pregnant soon.