



BOOSTING FERTILITY

Children are a blessing, but the journey to having them can prove challenging at times. While some people battle with unexplained infertility issues, for others, even a successful conception could be hindered by physical health problems. Preparing your body through conventional and holistic methods could help boost your fertility and maintain well-being for a healthy family

Writer Noch Noch Li

PREGNANT WOMAN/STOCKPHOTO

Building a family is a joyous occasion. However, getting pregnant might not be that straightforward. One in four couples have fertility problems, failing to conceive after 12 months of regular sexual intercourse without contraception.

Examitable physical issues, such as polycystic ovaries (PCOS) or low sperm count could result in infertility; other less evident impediments to getting pregnant also exist. Things, such as increased stress levels induced by hectic lifestyles, including attempts to balance one's career, family and social lives, and even finding time to exercise, eat healthily and relax, can all make our mind and body too tense and affect the frequency or effectiveness of sexual intercourse. Or, it could be because couples do not try for children until they are in their late thirties or early forties, when fertility rates are declining. Whether you have been trying or are planning to have children, there are multiple ways to overcome infertility or give it a boost. Methods can be used independently or used together to complement each other, but most importantly, you should feel comfortable about whatever method you are trying.

NATUROPATHY

Katherine Stark wanted to have the healthiest possible pregnancy and went for a ten-day fasting retreat at Natural Instinct Healing in Bali to detoxify, then used naturopathic herbs and nutritional supplements to enhance natural fertility. "I believe that getting our bodies ready before trying is why we conceived so easily after just four months," says Stark.

Naturopathy is rooted in a holistic approach that works to heal the body from the cellular level up. By using a variety of non-invasive diagnostic techniques, such as nail and tongue analysis, Kate Reardon, Naturopath & Nutritionist, Founder of Natural Instinct Healing, assesses any health issues,

then tailor-makes a treatment plan suited to the couple's goals and budget. Naturopathy also considers the mind, body and spirit of the person as a whole.

Reardon explains, "By undergoing a thorough cleanse, the body has time to heal and regenerate. Fasting allows for all the toxins to be removed from the cells and the liver to metabolise any excess hormones, such as cortisol (stress hormone leading to exhaustion), which may lead to infertility. It is also fantastic for couples that have undergone IVF without success or women who have been on various forms of synthetic contraception because it will 'pull out' any excess hormones that affect fertility."

HERBAL FORMULA

Stacey Roberts, a herbalist who runs Sharkey's Healing Centre in Australia, promotes balance between the body and mind in achieving natural fertility through herbal mixtures founded by Ruth Sharkey. Based on each person's condition, Roberts concocts an individualised herbal formula, bottles up the mixture and sends it off to clients to drink regularly. Every six weeks the formula is adjusted. "Conventional medicine looks at one hormone at a time

to check whether it is within normal range. We look at the balance between certain hormones and compare them to optimal ranges," says Roberts.

Karina Harrison experienced numerous miscarriages before she started taking Sharkey's Herbal formulas. After two months, she became pregnant again and carried the baby to full term, bearing a daughter.

Although there are some set formulas, such as the Antioxidant Vegetable Protein Powder Leaf Greens, consisting of spinach, barley and snow peas, Roberts notes that there are over 50 possible herbs she might use to maximise fertility. "Everyone's herbal formula is different, especially when the problem is unexplained fertility...I find that when more detailed tests are done to check different organ systems that support the reproductive system, there can be areas to improve on."

ARVIGO MAYA ABDOMINAL THERAPY

Georgina McAllister had a tilted uterus when she found Jenny Ostling at The

Sanctuary Hong Kong, who helped her get pregnant after just one session of Arvigo Maya Abdominal Therapy.

Ostling, certified in the ancient Mayan healing technique, helps solve fertility issues by a gentle, non-invasive massage technique. The aim is to reposition reproductive organs, improving blood flow to the abdominal and pelvic areas. Arvigo massage moves the tilted uterus back to its best possible position for blood and hormonal flow.

"Arvigo can be used independently, but is also a great therapy to complement other methods such as IVF," Ostling advises. "I want to help women get emotionally reconnected to their uterus, because their frustrations from fertility problems send negative energy." This massage method can also work to diminish abnormal growths in the pelvic and abdominal regions, mitigating conditions like ovarian cysts and fibroids.

IVF AND IUI

"Not ovulating is a common cause of inability to get pregnant," says Dr Masoud Afnan, Chief Medical Officer, Obstetrician & Gynecologist, and fertility specialist of Beijing United Family Hospital. "Other



THIS PAGE: Arvigo Maya Abdominal Therapy repositions reproductive organs. OPPOSITE PAGE: IVF and IUI can be good alternatives to holistic treatments; a healthy diet can be vital



causes could be blocked fallopian tubes, or because more couples these days wait until later in life to try, which makes it more difficult as fertility halves every two years after the age of 38." IVF (in vitro fertilisation) or IUI (intrauterine insemination) could be options.

The difference, Afnan explains, is that for IVF, the eggs are fertilised with sperm in a tube. Fertilised eggs are then inserted into the woman to develop. IUI involves injecting the sperms into the uterus during the woman's ovulation, aiming for fertilisation inside.

May Chen was unable to conceive after three years of trying through sexual intercourse, and being in her late thirties, the couple tried IVF. "I had injections and blood tests everyday in preparation." After the first attempt, Chen conceived and continued the pregnancy as normal. Her daughter is now five months old.

Mr and Mrs D opted for IVF after a failed attempt at IUI, and got pregnant

after one year of their fertility efforts. "An interesting aspect of the experience," they recount, "is that any embryos that survive to day five can be stored cryogenically for a future implantation. We had one of those

embryos from our first round of IVF. This last summer, we had that embryo implanted and she survived and is now our second child. IVF has worked for us twice from only one cultivation of embryos."



HORMONE INJECTIONS

"Not ovulating could be caused by hormonal disorders like hyperinsulinism or hyperandrogenism," says Dr Alejandra Mora, Gynecologist & Obstetrician, at International SOS Beijing Clinic, "so we need to figure out which hormone needs to be corrected or balanced."

Mora explains that a high body mass index could lead to insulin excess, in turn resulting in androgen excess, which is a major factor causing altered ovaries and thus reducing pregnancy chances. Follicle-stimulating hormones cause the eggs to

ripen and become ready for release. Usually a course of hormonal injections is taken over two weeks for ovaries to develop eggs for release.

However, all hormones have to be prescribed by a qualified doctor. "Some hormones can be used to induce ovulation, and that is only helpful when there is a problem with ovulation or if IUI or IVF have already been decided on," adds Mora.

FERTILITY PROGRAMMES

SHA Wellness Clinic partnered this year with the Reproduction Unit at Vistahermosa

Clinic to create a fertility programme combining medical and holistic methods. During the first week's stay, a range of medical tests, consultations and wellness activities are conducted at SHA. Every treatment is geared towards increasing fertility and fibroid reduction, and the programme features ginger compresses or baths for instance, as well as acupuncture to promote circulation in the pelvic region. After approximately two months the couples go through another week's stay, with checkups, hydro-aromatherapy and learning healthy cooking. Then, embryo transfers are carried out in the Vistahermosa Clinic.

Barbara Thorpe had been trying to get

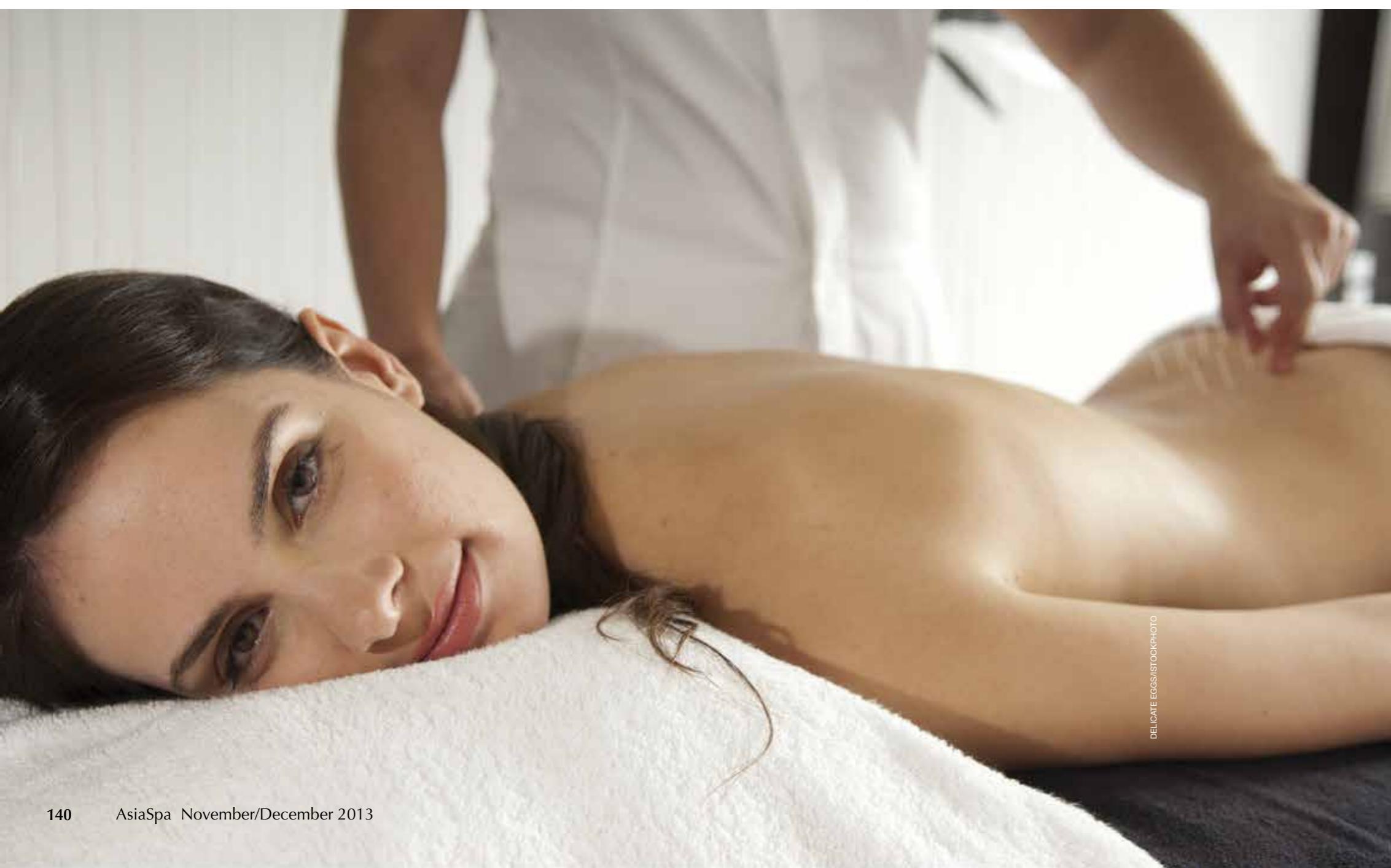
pregnant since 2008. She tried Clomid, a medicine used to stimulate ovulation, but to no avail. She approached the team at SHA a few months ago and participated in the fertility programme. After two treatments of egg donation, she is now eight weeks pregnant. "Yes, it is still possible to achieve a pregnancy. I am grateful to this team that changed my life," remarks Thorpe.

MIND-BODY PROGRAMME

The Mind-Body Programme for Infertility counteracts the negative impact of stress on fertility. "Depression and anxiety are



THIS PAGE: Acupuncture at the SHA Wellness Clinic. OPPOSITE PAGE: The Mind-Body Programme at The Domar Center counsels couples on modifying lifestyle habits



DELICATE EGGS/ISTOCKPHOTO

"Depression and anxiety are associated with lower fertility rates in both men and women"

~ Alice Domar

associated with lower fertility rates in both men and women. Thus practicing stress management is associated with significantly lower levels of depression and anxiety," says Alice Domar, PhD, Executive Director at the Domar Center.

Sally tried five IUIs and two IVF cycles at the age of 36, but none of them worked. She went to Domar Center and after two years, finally got pregnant. "I gained a lot of support and strength from talking to other women who were struggling with similar issues." Domar counsels couples on modifying lifestyle habits, such as exercise and caffeine intake, to increase chances of conception. "The programme is ten sessions, designed for women, but partners attend three of the ten sessions," continues Domar. As the name suggests, the Mind-Body Programme "complements conventional medicine and works in harmony to provide a greater level of well-being than either might achieve alone." The treatment methods include support groups, cognitive behavioural therapy and acupuncture.

FERTILITY BOOST

Naturopathy

Kate Reardon, Naturopath and Nutritionist, Natural Instinct Healing www.naturalinstincthealing.com

Herbal Formulas

Stacey Roberts, Sharkey's Healing Centre www.sharkeyshealingcentre.com.au

Arvigo Maya Abdominal Therapy
Jenny Ostling, The Sanctuary Hong Kong
www.thesanctuary.com.hk

IVF & IUI

Dr Masoud Afnan, Beijing Family United Hospital beijing.ufh.com.cn

Hormonal Injections

Dr Alejandro Mora, International SOS Beijing www.internationalsos.com

Fertility Programmes

SHA Wellness Clinic www.shawellnessclinic.com
Vistahermosa Clinic www.urvistahermosa.com

Mind-Body Programme

Alice Domar, PhD, The Domar Center www.domarcenter.com