

Acupuncture may hold promise for women with hormone disorder

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Getting pregnant with her first child was difficult, but when Rebecca Killmeyer of Charlottesville, Va. experienced a miscarriage during her second pregnancy, she wasn't sure if she would ever have another baby. When she decided to enter a study testing the impact of acupuncture on women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) at the University of Virginia Health System, she came out with a miracle.

"To our great surprise we were blessed with a third pregnancy during the PCOS study," said Killmeyer. "I'm absolutely certain the acupuncture treatments helped me ovulate regularly, which allowed me to become pregnant."

Lisa Pastore, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at UVA Health System and principle researcher of the study, was hoping for results like this. Her goal has been to help women with PCOS have regular menstrual cycles. PCOS causes a hormonal imbalance, interfering with ovulation and ultimately, fertility. With several women in the study reporting pregnancies, Pastore believes that acupuncture could be an important alternative, non-drug therapy for women with this disorder.

"Over the last year we have seen women who never had a regular menstrual cycle start having regular periods. We can also boast several pregnancies since the study began," said Pastore. "Now we would like to recruit more people to the study in order to complete the study. It is important for research to have enough participants to ensure that the

results are scientifically credible and not due to chance."

Scared and skeptical was how Killmeyer described her initial feelings towards the experimental treatment, but soon her worries gave way to relaxation.

"When I saw those tiny little needles coming at me I thought to myself, 'I didn't sign up for this!' but I tried it and after a few minutes I was asleep on the table," Killmeyer said. "The sessions were completely refreshing after awhile."

Killmeyer learned of her PCOS in 2005. Over the past five years she did not have regular, monthly periods. One month after she started acupuncture treatments she got a period and for the next three months, they continued.

"I had finished all my acupuncture treatments and was in the end stages of the study when I became pregnant," Killmeyer said. "We had already scheduled our follow-up appt with our fertility doctors when we found out we were pregnant."

Five percent of reproductive age women are affected by PCOS. Symptoms of PCOS can include small cysts on their ovaries, infrequent or irregular vaginal bleeding, male-pattern hair growth, and acne. Insulin resistance and pre-diabetes also can develop.

While there are many traditional drugs and therapies that manage this syndrome, this research is assessing whether acupuncture can be successful in regulating hormones and curing the symptoms of PCOS.

Source: University of Virginia

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