

Acupuncture Technique May Help Some Women Ovulate

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March 13, 2000 (New York) -- Tiny needles placed at acupuncture points on the skin and attached to a device that delivers a low-frequency electrical current improve ovulation in some women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a Swedish study has found.

PCOS is a complex hormonal disturbance in which women do not ovulate regularly, and their ovaries produce excessive quantities of male hormones, such as testosterone. To achieve pregnancy, women with PCOS must often have their ovaries stimulated, usually with fertility drugs. In addition, they often need long-term treatment to decrease their risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, or cancer of the uterus. But these treatments often bring unwanted side effects.

The study, whose results were published in the journal *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*, involved 24 PCOS patients between the ages of 24 and 40 whose menstrual periods were absent or irregular. The women were treated for 30 minutes twice a week for two weeks, then once a week, for a total of 10-14 treatments. Tiny needles were inserted in their skin at acupuncture points on the abdomen and calf thought to be associated with the ovary and uterus. These were attached to an electrical stimulator and stimulated with low-frequency energy for 30 seconds, causing non-painful muscle contractions.

Of the 24 women, 38% experienced a "good effect," which was defined as repeated ovulations or pregnancy during the treatment period or the three months after treatment. The number of ovulations per woman, per month, had averaged 0.15 in the three months before treatment, it increased to 0.66 during and after the treatments.

Elisabet Stener-Victorin, MD, and colleagues from Goteborg University in Sweden say that the acupuncture technique, called electro-acupuncture, may "reset" parts of the brain and nervous system that control the release of chemicals in the body responsible for ovulation. Of the nine women who had a good response to the acupuncture therapy, seven had failed to achieve adequate ovulation with clomiphene, the most common drug prescribed for women with ovulation problems.

Although the study was small and only about one-third of the women had a good response, the researchers say the results are impressive and that the technique could be an alternative or a complement to the use of fertility drugs to improve ovulation in some women with PCOS. But they say further studies are needed.