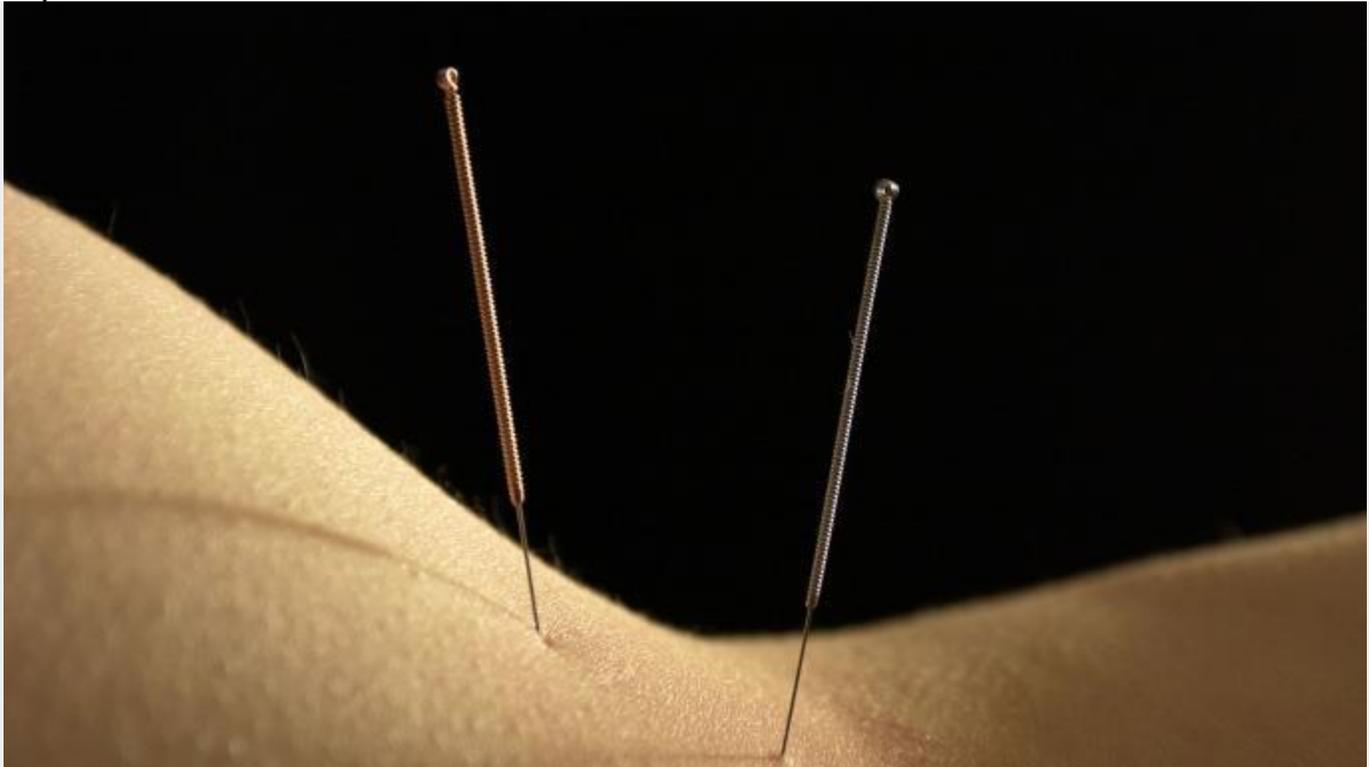


# Acupuncture ‘boosts success rate of IVF’

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Acupuncture more than doubles women’s chances of having a baby through IVF, according to early results from a British trial.

Researchers urged the NHS to offer the treatment routinely to all fertility clinic patients. One reproductive medicine expert said he had been skeptical but the results “made a convert” of him. However, others said the improved pregnancy rates might be the result of a placebo effect.

Acupuncture is based on a theory that inserting needles can stimulate nerves to change blood flow and release painkilling chemicals. The government’s healthcare watchdog has endorsed the treatment for chronic lower back pain and recurring headaches but says the evidence for other applications is currently too flimsy.

The trial at Homerton University Hospital in Hackney, east London, involved 140 women aged 23 to 43, with half given four 25-minute sessions of acupuncture. The first results will be presented today at the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology in Finland. Of the 71 women who had acupuncture, 21 became pregnant, compared with six of the 69 who did not have the treatment.

Karin Gillerman, the acupuncturist who led the trial, said that the theory was that stimulating the nerves at particular points around the ovaries increased the blood flowing to them and helped the development of their follicles, where the eggs mature.

She won the support of Roy Homburg, professor of reproductive medicine at Queen Mary University of London. “Being a cynical conventional doctor, I didn’t believe it was going to work,” he said. “Having seen these results, I’m completely converted.”

Professor Adam Balen, chairman of the British Fertility Society, said: “I don’t think there’s any evidence of harm from acupuncture and those who undergo it probably get extra support in terms of time spent with the therapist. I don’t think we have enough to advise all to undergo acupuncture.”