

Opening the Door to Fertility

Scan the stacks at your local library, and you'll find shelves bowed with books on how to get pregnant. From the looks of it, one of our most

primal functions—the creation of new life—seems a terribly complicated task. Unfortunately, that's exactly what it has become for the 6.1 million women and their partners currently struggling with infertility. In their desperation to conceive, many people find themselves navigating the conventional fertility path with all its confusing twists, turns, and dead ends: beginning with invasive tests, progressing to harsh fertility drugs with countless side effects, and culminating with in vitro fertilization if all else fails.

For the most extreme cases of infertility, those in which one or both of the partners have medical issues preventing pregnancy, that path—bumps and all—might actually be the only way to get pregnant. But holistic physicians like Joel Evans, MD, OB/GYN, author of *The Whole Pregnancy Handbook*, find that people too often resort to drastic treatment before ever giving their innate fertility a chance to prove itself. According to Evans, “60 to 70 percent of illnesses are lifestyle related. So it would make sense to treat lifestyle issues or do lifestyle interventions, and then use medicine for the problems that are left.”

Our special section aims to shift the dialogue about infertility, so we focus on each person as an innately fertile being, who needs help manifesting this fertility, not as someone suffering from an acute dysfunction. Some approaches we explore are new and some are tried-and-true, but all of them will support your mind, body, and spirit as you find your path to parenthood.

Maya Abdominal Massage

By Catherine S. Gregory

Bring the uterus into balance, and the whole being will follow.

My path to motherhood came as a surprise. I didn't expect to jumpstart my fertility on the beaches of the Yucatan, but that's exactly what happened when I booked a relaxing, two-hour Maya massage session with a traditional healer. After the massage, the healer told me through a translator that women sought his work when they had difficulty conceiving. He looked me in the eye as he spoke to me, and the translator reported that I no longer had fertility problems.

I was taken aback because I hadn't mentioned my concerns about not being able to conceive. But his words proved true. Not long after returning home to a loving reunion with my partner, we discovered I was pregnant. I have since learned that my massage in Mexico included Maya uterine massage, an ancient technique used to reposition a displaced uterus. According to the Maya, if a woman's uterus is out of alignment, so is

her whole being. Returning the uterus to its proper position in the pelvis brings a woman into a state of balance—and, in my case, into an instant state of fertility.

During my annual exams, gynecologists had often mumbled something about my tipped uterus, but whenever I probed for more information, they had reassured me: “Don’t worry; lots of women have this issue.” Yet as I learned more about the uterus through the Maya healing perspective, I realized my retroverted uterus actually contributed to my years of menstrual difficulties and low-back pain, as well as to my inability to conceive. My backwards-facing cervix had made the basic journey of sperm-meets-egg impossible.

Maya massage has gained popularity in the US and Europe through the help of Dr. Rosita Arvigo, an American naprapathic physician who trained for more than a decade with one of the great Maya shamans of Belize, Don Elijio Panti. Arvigo has in turn trained more than 200 healthcare practitioners to perform the Arvigo Techniques of Maya Abdominal Massage (ATMAM). Her holistic healing method centers around uterine massage, using noninvasive, external massage to reposition the uterus and other abdominal organs and to make skeletal corrections to enhance the flow of blood, nerve impulse, lymphatic fluid, and life energy to those organs.

Arvigo practitioners also look to the menstrual cycle for clues to reproductive health, but the position of the uterus ranks as their most important assessment. “Undiagnosed uterine prolapse is a big issue affecting fertility,” Arvigo says, explaining that high-impact sports, falls, injuries to the tailbone or sacrum, heavy lifting, and even pregnancy and childbirth can easily displace the uterus. Repositioning it often corrects the issues causing infertility, such as uterine lining health, ovarian dysfunction, hormonal imbalance, and obstructions such as blocked tubes, surgical adhesions, or fibroids.

Although uterine massage is an ancient technique—a specialty not only of the Maya, but also of other indigenous cultures in South America, Asia, and Africa—its relatively recent introduction into the modern world of reproductive health means clinical studies have yet to establish its success rates. But that doesn’t deter people who visit Arvigo practitioners like Shelley Torgrove, owner of Apothecary Tinctura in Denver. Torgrove’s popular fertility program parallels that of other Arvigo practitioners and includes regular ATMAM treatments, self-care massage instruction, herbal tinctures to balance hormones and cleanse the uterus, menstrual cycle charting, and lifestyle recommendations such as yoga, meditation, and journaling. Pregnancy reports from happy clients usually start coming in within three months to a year after treatments begin.

Certified nurse practitioner Cindy Aspromonte uses her ATMAM training with patients through a Denver OB/GYN office and at Apothecary Tinctura. The majority of her patients suffer unexplained infertility, meaning no anatomical or structural issue prevents them from conceiving. “But when we do their exam, we often notice that their uterus is off to the right or the left or lower or displaced in some way,” says Aspromonte. “If the uterus is displaced to one side, it can infringe on the ovaries so you don’t have strong ovarian function,” she adds. “Sometimes you can get a short luteal phase, short follicular

phase, or inadequate endometrial lining buildup. [The massage] just opens up the whole pelvis so everything's in proper position and balance and pelvic health can be achieved.”

Displacement of other organs can push the uterus and ovaries out of place, too, says Marty Ryan, an Arvigo practitioner who works at Seattle's Tummy Temple. One of Ryan's clients had a prolapsed colon crowding the uterus and ovary on the right side. After six months of biweekly massage and herbs prescribed to cleanse the uterine lining, she was able to conceive and deliver a healthy baby boy. Ryan treated the woman's partner as well to increase their overall chances of conceiving. Arvigo says men can have obstructions in the pelvis, too, in addition to the possibility of a clogged prostate. “The massage is very helpful for the man in just bringing back life force to the reproductive system,” she says.

For anyone who wants—literally—to take her healing into her own hands, the instructions for self-massage are quite simple (see sidebar). Or you can sign up for any of the Maya Abdominal Massage self-care workshops that are offered across the country. For a workshop schedule and a list of practitioners by state, go to www.arvigomassage.com.