

Seminar 13: **The Role of Traditional Chinese Medicine Before, During & After Childbirth**

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According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) during childbirth there is a loss of Qi, Blood and Body Fluids. In caring for a newborn, mothers sometimes lose sight of their own health and wellbeing – eating and sleeping when the opportunity arises. Exhaustion can lead to post-natal depression which in turn can lead to problems with breastfeeding, resulting in a grumpy baby – and so the cycle continues.

TCM looks to treat individual's own needs by going to the root of the disharmony and thereby reducing symptoms such as insomnia, anxiety, inability to focus and depression. Traditionally in TCM the post-natal period lasts for four months where the mother is given time to rest and recuperate from the birth with help from close family and using TCM nutritional guidelines of warm, easy to digest foods, often with added ginger to warm the body.

TCM views the first 3 days post-birth as a time of elimination and assists with this by moving and clearing stagnation. The next 30 days or more are for strengthening and rebuilding Blood and Qi lost through pregnancy and childbirth. Following childbirth, mothers should avoid exposure to Wind, Cold and stress (all of which are considered pathogens in Chinese medicine) while she is particularly vulnerable. The mother should avoid heavy lifting to minimise risk of uterine prolapse. Moxibustion is often used to warm the uterus and collaterals, dry up lochia, prevent or treat haemorrhage, shrink the uterus back to normal size and stimulate milk production.

Acupuncture and herbs can also assist with milk flow and delayed lactation. Research shows that breastfeeding is protective against breast cancer, ovarian cancer and post-natal depression. Breastfeeding also helps the uterus contract to pre-pregnancy size, is useful for weight loss and is less expensive than infant formula (Mann & Zhang, 2014).

Acupuncture and herbal medicine are often also effective in combatting

- severe morning sickness
- symphysis pubis dysfunction
- sciatica
- threatened miscarriage
- viral infections during pregnancy
- stress
- anti- and post-natal depression
- generalised pain
- turning breech babies
- inducing labour (post-42-weeks)

Lesage, A. (2014). *Postnatal Acupuncture can Increase Breastfeeding Success and Energy*. [online] Day Wellness- Where Faith and Health Met. Available at: <http://daywellness.com/acupuncture/postnatal-acupuncture-boost-energy-breastfeeding-success/> [Accessed 27 Jun. 2017].

Mann, B. and Zhang, H. (2014). Improvement in Lactation with Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Herbal Medicine: A Case Study. *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 105, pp.50-55.