



Yoga for Fertility

Introduction

Infertility affects approximately 1 in 4 of couples trying to conceive. This process is known to have a negative impact on their quality of life. A multidisciplinary approach, incorporating both modern and alternative medicine allows for the possibility of a better outcome.¹

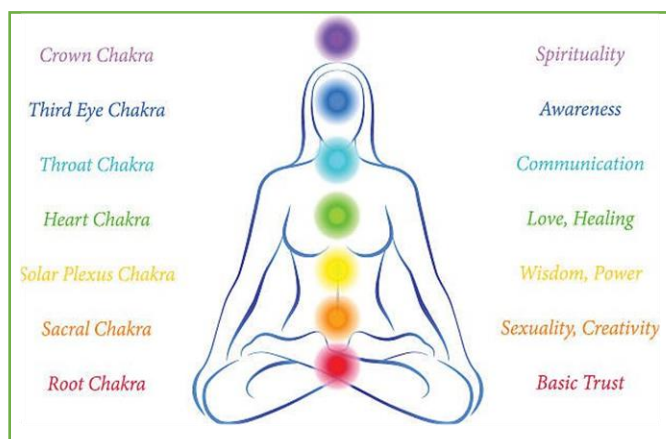
There are many studies to show that regular yoga and meditation practice reduce overall stress and anxiety levels.^{2,3} Yoga for fertility is another tool couples can use to manage the stress and emotional rollercoaster of infertility treatment.⁴ Yoga aims to develop peace and calmness in the mind during ART cycles and allow for a more positive connection to the body.

Menstrual Cycle

Yoga for fertility helps a woman become more in touch with her menstrual cycle by honouring her body during the different phases of the cycle. I aim to educate women to listen to the subtle signs given by the body during each phase and how to work with their body and their energy levels based on their hormones. This is especially important during menses, as the body is wanting to rest during the first day or two of a woman's period however due to today's busy lifestyle, many women are not given the opportunity to do so. Ayurveda, the sister science to yoga says that women should slow down and give themselves permission to recover as the uterus is contracting to push the blood out. Yoga may also help treat menstrual disorders by balancing the hormones, thus increasing a woman's ability to conceive.⁵

Yoga Asana (Postures)

The fertility asana (postures) sequences before and after IVF cycles aim to gently increase core, leg and feet strength as I want to move prana (energy) into the sacral chakra. According to yoga and Ayurveda, the body is divided in 7 major chakras (energy centres) along the length of the spine. The sacral chakra is the second chakra, coming after the root chakra and before the solar plexus chakra. It is associated with reproductive organs, kidney and urinary system.



IVF Treatment

During IVF treatment, the yoga sequences will be modified based on the treatment cycle phase. I like to follow the below general guidelines when it comes to exercising:

Pre ovarian stimulation phase: avoid high impact training which increases cortisone levels in the body. *Stress and cortisone:* Cortisone is the stress hormone released by the adrenal glands. It is believed that the adrenal glands can “steal” sex hormones when a person is chronically stressed as the chemical precursor for cortisone is the same as for the sex hormones. A chronically stressed body will thus have an imbalance of this chemical precursor, resulting in a lesser amount for production of sex hormones, in turn negatively impacting fertility.⁶

Ovarian Stimulation phase: avoid any high impact and abdominal workouts and nothing at all if there is pain or discomfort in the pelvic area.

Post-Oocyte Retrieval: avoid any physical exercise for 48-hours after egg retrieval to allow the body and any discomfort to settle.

Post EmbryoTransfer: it is best to avoid any workouts 48 hours after transfer. After that it is good to start very gentle, low impact activities such as walking and yoga. In general, we want to avoid shortness of breath, dehydration and over-heating.

Couples Yoga

Couples yoga enables couples to reconnect with each other during this process of disconnection where the doctors take control of their lives and bodies, especially their sexual life. This can negatively impact relationships. Doing a yoga session together allows their bodies to work together in unison where they can support each other, breathe together and spend quality time together. Couples yoga allows men to also enjoy the benefits of yoga and in cases where male factor infertility is the cause, the stress reducing ability of yoga may improve sperm quality.^{7,8}

Meditations and Visualisations:

Visualisations allow positive affirmation. During IVF women tend to hand over their bodies to their doctors which may make them feel as if they don't have any control over their reproductive ability. I use visualisations to help women rebuild a connection to their womb and ovaries through self-love. This essentially gives space for negative emotions to arise and then leave the body, creating space for positive emotions and affirmations.

Meditation is a powerful tool for overall well-being. It enables stillness in the mind, observation of thoughts and attention to breath. It allows us to view ourselves objectively so that we can see a clearer picture of life, without the haze of emotions enabling us to make better decisions. During meditation, short moments of no thoughts create pockets of peace and with sustained practice the peace within us grows which is unrelated to the external events happening in life. Meditation creates a safe space for thoughts and emotions, where you can learn detachment and non-judgement. There are many studies to show regular meditation lowers stress, anxiety and depression.^{9,10,11}

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