

'Chinese medicine helped us to **HAVE OUR BABY**'



Steven and Julie tried every kind of conventional fertility treatment to help them conceive. When Julie still had not fallen pregnant, the couple turned to alternative medicine...

After seven years of trying, Steven and Julie Mead finally had to admit it: something was wrong.

'Julie had an operation to remove a fibroid, and after that she was fine. Then we found out that I had an abnormally low sperm count,' says Steven.

Steven's doctor told him there was nothing to be done. After years of trying, waiting and patience, this was it.

'The doctors didn't offer any treatments' he says. 'It was an open and shut case.' Steven and Julie also saw a private consultant. 'Although he offered alternatives - IVF and

a Chinese practitioner he'd read about in a health magazine. She was trying to increase his sperm count with traditional Chinese herbal treatments.'

Traditional Chinese medicine is used to balance and strengthen the kidney Yin and Yang, the Qi and blood, because imbalances in these are often causes of abnormal or low sperm counts.

First of all, Steven had to get a liver check from his GP to make sure his body could handle the herbs. Then, in early September, Steven and Julie drove from Birmingham to London, to Dr Zhai's clinic.

In the initial hour-long interview Dr Zhai closely

who continued treatments for longer than six months, the successful conception rate stood at 84 per cent. Armed with the information she had gained from watching and questioning Steven, Dr Zhai prepared a mixture of herbs, including wolfberry fruit, Chinese yam and rehmannia root, all imported from China.

'I was surprised when I saw what was in the bag she gave me first time,' Steven says. 'It had roots, twigs and bark!'

Dr Zhai told Steven to soak the mixture in water for half an hour, then boil it for 20 minutes and drink it twice a day. 'It was like a strong, thick herbal tea,' says Steven, 'but I didn't worry about the taste.'

Steven began taking the herbs in early October. He revisited Dr Zhai twice that month, three times in November and then regularly every three weeks. Almost every time he visited she showed him an increase in his sperm count.

Over the next two or three months Steven and Julie kept their fingers crossed. They so wanted the treatment to work, but how could they pin their hopes on this last chance?

In January, three months after starting treatment, Julie found out she was pregnant. 'We were together when we

did the test,' Steven says. 'We tried not to get too excited, but you can't put into words the worry and hope.' Daniel Levi Mead was born last summer.

'No doctors told us about herbal treatments,' says Steven. 'If we hadn't discovered it through a friend we'd have given up.'

● Dr Xiao Ping Zhai qualified in Western medicine before turning to traditional Chinese medicine. She has been specialising in reproductive medicine for the last 14 years. She runs two clinics at: 10 Harley Street, London W1N 1AA (tel: 0171 467 8420); and 28 Thames Road, Strand-on-the-Green, London W4 3RJ (call 0181 742 3728 or fax 0181 747 8886).

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ICSI (Intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection) - the costs were mind-blowing,' Steven says. But it wasn't the money that put them off: they knew there were no guarantees that they would succeed. The couple hit their lowest point.

Then, a chance conversation with a friend led them to discover Chinese herbal practitioner Dr Zhai.

'I discovered that my friend was also infertile, but was visiting

watched Steven, noting his posture and movements. Dr Zhai explained that she needed to observe Steven's facial colour, the condition and colour of his tongue, his general demeanour and his pulses, three in each wrist. She also took a family history.

The next step was to visit a private clinic so a sperm sample could be taken. The results were faxed to Dr Zhai, who explained that, of the patients

THE THERAPY

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners use a combination of Chinese herbs and/or acupuncture to harmonise and balance the flow of energy in the body along channels called meridians. TCM is most widely known in the West for its treatment in cases of allergy-related conditions. TCM describes fertility as originating in the brain and flowing to the reproductive organs via the kidneys. The patient is prescribed a mix of herbs; some improve the function of reproductive organs, others help alleviate the possibility of miscarriage. TCM has treated infertility, hormonal problems, blocked tubes and miscarriage and has also been used in preparing patients for IVF.