

Spas the latest trend in fertility treatment

Everything from 'lunaception' massage to yoga and reflexology on offer to help childless couples get pregnant

MISTY HARRIS
CanWest News Service

Aspiring to go from being pampered to becoming parents, a growing number of couples are turning to spas to increase their chances of conceiving.

Instead of taking hormone injections, prospective mothers are submitting to acupuncture needles. Meds are being traded for massage. And in place of a cold doctor's office, couples enjoy feng shui rooms, cascading waterfalls, and enough New Age music to turn a pit bull into a poodle.

It's all part of the philosophy that relaxation is the drug-free path to reproductive success.

"You become a big believer when it works for you," says Kristi Slemko, a Calgary woman who credits acupuncture for helping her to get pregnant.

Like her mother, who needed fertility drugs to conceive, Slemko was diagnosed with anovulation, a condition in which the ovary doesn't regularly release a ripened egg.

While waiting to start using the drug Clomiphene citrate, she read an article linking acupuncture with fertility and thought she'd give it a try.



SUPPLIED

A couple enjoys a massage at Qua Baths at Caesars Palace.

Three months into the treatment, and with not a single infertility drug ingested, Slemko was pregnant.

"The lights are dim, there's that nature-type music playing, you're covered up with warm blankets," recalls Slemko, now the mother of a healthy six-month-old boy.

"It was just like a spa treatment, except my medical plan covered it."

According to the president of SpaFinder, a global industry monitor, the union of holistic fertility treatments with a spa or wellness centre is one of the hottest developing trends of 2008.

"People are waiting longer to get pregnant — and age, of course, has an effect on their ability to do that," says Susie Ellis. "So we're seeing these trends coming together."

One in six North American couples struggles with infertility, according to the Infertility Awareness Network of Canada. Though circumstances vary, a medical infertility treatment such as in-vitro fertilization typically offers women ages 35 to 39 a 30-to 45-per-cent chance of conceiving.

Ellis acknowledges scientific evidence for the efficacy of spas in fertility treatments "isn't overwhelming," but says "I think most of us recognize that relaxation is a healthful thing that provides a more conducive environment for sexual intimacy and conception."

The Spa at Little Dix Bay in the British Virgin Islands offers "fertility yoga" and "fertility reflexology." In Mexico, staffers at the Tides Riviera Maya take couples through an ancient fertility ritual in the spa's "house of fertility."

At The Raj Ayurvedic Spa in Iowa, a daily three-hour program of massage, heat treatment and mild herbal enema is collectively claimed by the staff to create "the ideal internal physical environment for healing."

Fitting with Las Vegas's reputation for all things physical, the strip's famed Caesars Palace began offering its own fertility program last year.

Patrons of the hotel's Qua Baths & Spa can undergo "lunaception" massage treatments, which are conducted during the full moon in the presence of a rose-quartz fertility idol.

"In the western world, we tend to approach everything with chemicals and science. So for us, it was a unique opportunity to bring some holistic healing to people," says Jennifer Lynn, spa director at Qua, where a 75-minute lunaception package costs \$420.

"Couples are always anxious to get out of the treatment room and go upstairs (to their hotel room)."

Acupuncturist Leslie Ring-Adams, whose focus as founder of Calgary's Body in Balance is reproductive health, gynecology and obstetrical disorders, says she does not advocate abandoning medical treatments for couples trying to conceive.

"The worst thing you can tell a woman who's trying to get pregnant is that she just needs to relax," says Ring-Adams.

Although Ring-Adams has seen patients such as Slemko get pregnant without the aid of medical therapies, she believes a woman's best chance is to use acupuncture as an adjunct to assisted reproductive technologies.