

Withey: Edmonton mom credits Chinese treatment for helping her overcome infertility

BY ELIZABETH WITHEY, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM MAY 21, 2012



Cecil Horwitz is an acupuncturist who specializes in fertility enhancement and pregnancy-related issues. His patient, Dana Murphy, used a combination of Western and Chinese medicine to conceive her daughter Sarah. (EDMONTON JOURNAL,SHAUGHN BUTTS)

Photograph by: Shaughn Butts

Baby Sarah is growing fast. She eats carrots, squash, peas and bananas. She weighs 14 pounds. With auburn hair and bright grey eyes, she's a miniature version of her mother.

"In school, I wasn't the one saying 'I want to be a teacher or a doctor,'" Dana Murphy says, tickling her eight-month-old daughter. "I wanted to be a mom. It was always the most important thing to me."

Murphy's motherhood dreams have been realized, despite the odds, and she firmly believes Chinese medicine deserves the credit.

The 35-year-old was diagnosed in her teens with polycystic ovary syndrome, a common endocrine disorder among women which can cause infertility and a host of other unfortunate symptoms, among them obesity, facial hair, thinning hair and acne.

Murphy knew PCOS would make it difficult, maybe even impossible, for her to have children. She and her husband, Chris, were up for the fertility challenges when they decided to become parents in 2008. Little did they know how frustrated they would get with conventional medicine, how desperate they

would become.

“If someone said standing out in the street buck naked waving a rubber chicken over your head could get you pregnant, you’d do it,” she says.

Murphy took fertility meds at increasing dosages while waiting for a referral to Edmonton’s fertility clinic. The drug, Clomid, made her so emotional she dubbed it Clo-Mood. “You’d go from zero to explosion in a snap.”

After a year, Murphy was depressed and still not pregnant. That’s when she turned her sights to Eastern medicine.

“I was probably a bit of a basket case,” she says of the first day she walked into Cecil Horwitz’s clinic, [Whole Family Health](#), in Edmonton’s Parkallen neighbourhood. Horwitz is a certified acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist who specializes in women’s reproductive health, including fertility enhancement.

“She had so many doors closed,” Horwitz recalls of Murphy when he first met her. “She needed encouragement. No does not mean no all the time.”

This week is Canadian Infertility Awareness Week, and Murphy and Horwitz want to get people talking about holistic reproductive therapies so other people trying for kids don’t give up hope. One in six Canadian couples of child-bearing age suffer from infertility, according to the Infertility [Awareness Association of Canada](#).

“Fertility starts at home,” Horwitz says. “If you’re going to create life, the vessel within which you carry life has to be nourished. That means the mind and the body.”

Horwitz got Murphy started on acupuncture and a regimen of Chinese herbs, as well as moxibustion, in which sticks of ground mugwort are burned on a patient’s skin. Murphy struggled to convince her friends and family, even herself, that such treatments could improve her odds. “People were like, you’re gonna try what? They said, that’s bunk.”

In 2011, Murphy got into the Edmonton fertility clinic, and was pregnant after one intrauterine insemination. After a two-and-a-half years waiting, the news was surreal. She knows it’s Chinese medicine that optimized the environment for her to finally conceive. “There’s no doubt in my mind. If I hadn’t seen Cecil before and after, I wouldn’t be a mom today.”

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“We were nourishing the soil before the seed was planted,” Horwitz said.

Think of Horwitz’s treatments as auxiliary health care, one that creates the ideal conditions for conception, be it natural or through assisted reproductive technology like IUI and in vitro fertilization.

Acupuncture is believed to boost a woman’s chances of getting pregnant significantly, which is why some fertility clinics in Canada offer acupuncture on site. And holistic centres like Vancouver’s Acubalance Wellness Clinic work with reproductive specialists to offers IVF support to couples.

In Murphy’s case, the treatments reduced her stress, regulated her insulin levels (a problem for PCOS

sufferers), regulated her menstrual cycle and increased her uterine blood flow.

Chinese therapies can help improve male fertility, too, Horwitz says, and he recommend the couple both get treatment to give them the best chances.

Horwitz isn't against conventional medicine. Rather, he sees the two as a team. "I need to have Western medicine on my side," he says. "I will never go against what a doctor says."

The therapies he practises see positive results again and again. "We have a 70 per cent success rate here at the clinic," he says, clarifying that 'success' means a birth, and not just a pregnancy.

Sarah, who was born in September, offers one gummy smile, then a second one, as if she knows she's the proof women stamped as infertile or subfertile can beat the odds.

"I hate using that word, infertile," Horowitz says. "Until a doctor says, her tubes are blocked and she needs surgery, I'm a very hopeful person."

Horwitz's goal isn't to score a bunch of new patients. His schedule is packed. What he wants to do is educate people about Chinese medicine so wannabe parents might consider it early in the game.

"We typically see people when they're at the end of their rope. They come to us as a last resort, instead of a first resort."

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