

## Acupuncture and pregnancy

by Tracy B. McGinnis

**With all of the technological advancements available today for pregnant women some are choosing to incorporate the traditional healing method of acupuncture to help promote healing and well-being for themselves and baby. This traditional Chinese medicine has been used for thousands of years and involves focusing on certain points on the body in order to promote healing and well-being. But how does it work for expectant moms and their babies, and is it the right treatment for you?**

### Benefits to mom and baby

Eunice Kan, LAc, Dipl OM, a licensed and national board certified (NCCAOM) acupuncturist, with a private practice in Burlingame, California, says there are many benefits to both mom and baby both during and after pregnancy.

“Acupuncture can help decrease morning sickness, nausea, vomiting, acid reflux, constipation, hemorrhoids, [back pain](#) & sciatica, edema, and more.” Kan adds that a mother’s [immune system](#) is boosted through the use of acupuncture which indirectly boosts the baby’s immune system as well. “It also decreases the chances of miscarriage, and helps moms sleep better, feel more relaxed and increases their energy.”

“Acupuncture increases blood flow to the uterus to help nourish the baby, as well as, make pregnancy more comfortable,” says Denise Noyer, L. Ac, fellow of the American Board of Reproductive Oriental Medicine and board certified in Oriental reproductive medicine.

Martha Lucas, Ph D, LAc, whose private practice is based in Denver, is a nationally certified Practitioner of Oriental Medicine with more than 15 years of clinical professional experience in the [healthcare](#) field, says a mother’s use of nutrients is maximized, in addition to helping regulate [blood pressure](#), lower back pain, and edema.

“The primary benefit to the moms is the calming of the sympathetic nervous system so mom feels more



relaxed which benefits the baby as well,” explains Ted Ray, LAc, DNBAO, who runs Peninsula Acupuncture in California. “Supporting the kidney and liver meridians also supports the overall nourishment of the baby.”

Noyer adds, “It increases your chances of delivering on time without medications, inducing labor and rotating breech babies.”

Not only are acupuncturists enthusiastic about the benefits their practice offers to [pregnant](#) women, but they say the benefits continue on after baby arrives - helping new moms recovery quickly with less complications, as well as deal with postpartum concerns with everything from depression to infections.

“Treatment after baby is born will rebuild core Qi, blood, reinvigorate digestion, help with milk production or regulate the period,” explains Lucas. “Acupuncture will also help with emotional issues that sometimes arise post-birth including anxiety and depression as well as back pain and starting to regulate the periods again.”

Noyer adds, “Acupuncture can help facilitate milk production, relieve postpartum fatigue, and help balance the huge hormone transition, as well as quicken the recovery so the mom can feel like her self again.”

## Acupuncture treatment

Before a single pressure point is pinned your acupuncturist will review your health history which will include any pre-existing conditions, your current health status, and your health before [getting pregnant](#).

“Looking at mom's tongue and pulse will also tell us what's going on inside the body with specific organs and the general health of the mother and the baby,” explains Kan.

“Needles are put into specific parts of the body, specific to the patient, and retained for about 30 minutes.” Kan says an entire session usually lasts about an hour and may include other treatments ranging from heat therapy to dietary and exercise recommendations.

“If one is seeking acupuncture to help with labor and delivery, the treatment is much more involved, and can take up to 1 hour and 15 minutes,” says Noyer.

“Pulse diagnosis also allows the practitioner to determine whether there are energetic imbalances, how strong the organ systems' energies are, and how Qi and blood are flowing,” explains Lucas. “Then an acupuncture point prescription is determined to address any imbalances.” Lucas also adds that the insertion of the needles should not hurt.

“Usually treatment involves 8-12 very fine needles at various points over the body,” says Ray. “Points over the abdomen support the fetus and conception, points around the head and ears calm the mind, and points on the legs support blood and nourishing the womb.”

## Risks

“There are minor risks associated with acupuncture – the most common being bruising,” says Noyer “It is important to see an acupuncturist who is familiar with working with pregnant women.”

Prior to starting treatment you should consult your doctor to discuss the risk and benefits associated with your specific situation. There are specific points that should not be touched by acupuncture including the lower back and lower abdomen during the first trimester according to Kan. “During 2nd and 3rd trimesters needles should not be on any part of the back or abdomen.”

Other points that should be avoided during pregnancy according to Kan include the gallbladder 21, (top of the shoulder), large intestine 4 (dorsal part of the hand between thumb and index finger), and Spleen 6 (about 2 inches above medial malleolus, posterior to the tibia), as these points are used to induce labor.

“No adequately trained practitioner would use points and/or needle manipulation that would injure women when pregnant. My position is that there are minimal risks - generally the same risks that are mentioned with general acupuncture,” adds Lucas.

## **Finding an acupuncturist**

”It is important that the acupuncturist communicate with the OB - especially if they are preparing you for delivery,” says Noyer.

If you’ve talked with your doctor, done your research, and feel you are ready to explore acupuncture further, experts agree you should seek out a licensed professional. Laws vary state by state, with some states maintaining their own boards (such as CA).

“If there is no state board in their state, one should look for an acupuncturist who is certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM),” suggests Kan.

“I advise asking for referrals if you can,” adds Lucas. “Don't be afraid to ask your acupuncturist where the or she was trained; did they do any internships; do they have any additional training in the areas of fertility treatment or treatment during pregnancy; can they give you names of other pregnant women whom they have treated?”

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