

FAQs & Resources



We periodically update this material to more accurately reflect the latest changes in understanding, practice, and policy. These questions come from real-life questions posed by individuals like yourself. We hope you find them helpful and informative.

Please let us know if your question is not answered here. To send a question, use the form to the right. Please use the word FAQ in your comment. If your question is pressing, please either call us directly [03 9654 7181], or email us [info@stevenclavey.com] depending upon the level of urgency involved.

General

Location

We are located on the 2nd floor at 126 Russell Street in the city of Melbourne, Australia, in the Theosophical Society building.

This is between Bourke Street and Little Collins, just across from the Greater Union Cinema (the only cinema on Russell Street). If you are familiar with the Theosophical Society bookshop, we are on the same floor.

Telephone: 03 9654 7181

Hours of operation

Monday 10 AM until 4:15
Tuesday 10 AM until 5:30
Wednesday 10 AM until 4:15
Thursday 10 AM until 6:00
Friday 11 AM until 6:00

We are closed between 1:30 and 3:00 everyday.

Appointments

What should I bring?

Your diary with dates of recent menstrual cycles; any Western medicine exam results (if available — if you are clear about them you can just report the results without hardcopy).

How long will my appointment take?

For initial consultations one should allow an hour: 30 minutes for the actual consultation, and 30 minutes for script design and dispensing.

How often do I have to come for an appointment?

This depends upon the problem being treated. Acupuncture treatments require regular appointments, usually at least once per week. Herbal appointments are less frequent, although the initial one or two appointments may also be one or two weeks apart to check on initial responses to the herbs. Herbal appointments for gynaecological conditions are usually about 4 to 6 weeks apart.

Do I have to go somewhere else to get my herbs?

No, your herbs are dispensed on the premises.

How do I pay?

Charges are settled on the day of appointment. We accept cash and eftpos payments, but **not** American Express, Diners Club. We **do not** accept personal cheques.

Can I get a health fund rebate?

All but one fund (ACA) give rebates for acupuncture, about two-thirds give rebates for Chinese herbal medicine. To be certain, please contact your own health fund, but be sure to say Chinese herbal medicine, as this is in a different category to 'herbal medicine' which one might get from a naturopath.

Of course, all practitioners at the clinic are registered with the **Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria**, in both the acupuncture and herbal medicine divisions of Chinese medicine.

Acupuncture

Do I need to disrobe?

No, although areas to be treated will need to be uncovered briefly; they will then be covered again with a towel. It is always a good idea, however, to wear loose comfortable clothing for ease of shifting.

Does it hurt?

It **does not** feel like a hypodermic injection at all (see "needles" below). The sensation is an interesting dull numbness that the Chinese call "sour". There may be a slight pricking when the needle passes through the skin; most people do not even feel this. If there is any sharpness after this, let your practitioner know so that the point can be adjusted to be more comfortable.

Acupuncture Needles

Acupuncture needles are very fine, much smaller in diameter than hypodermic needles, which need to inject substances into a vein. Also unlike hypodermics, which slice into the vein, acupuncture needles are also gently rounded at the tip, as they ease their way into the tissues. No contact with veins or arteries is needed, and therefore in most cases little bleeding is expected when the needles are removed.

Only sterile, single-use, disposable needles are used.

Cooking Herbs

The cooking pot should be either glass, ceramic, or enamel. Inexpensive traditional Chinese ceramic cooking pots are available at the clinic and should be soaked for 3 hours prior to first use.

See your herbal prescription for any variations to the length of time for cooking the herbs (you will generally be informed of any differences both at your consultation and when the herbs are being dispensed).

Instructions for Cooking One Packet

- 1. Empty the contents of any one packet of herbs into your cooking pot.
- Add 3 cups of hot water (or enough to cover herbs for larger packets) and allow to soak for 10 minutes.
- Bring the herbs to a boil, then reduce to a low flame allowing the herbs to simmer slowly, with the lid slightly ajar for approximately 40 minutes, or until reduced to one third.
- Strain the liquid into a bowl and set aside.
- 2. Add 2 cups of boiling water to the herbs already in the pot (or enough to cover the herbs for larger packets).
- Simmer slowly with the lid slightly ajar for approximately 40 minutes or until reduced by half.
- Strain the liquid into the previously mentioned bowl and set aside.
- 3. Repeat step two.

These instructions will occasionally be changed for certain types of prescription. You will generally be informed of any differences in cooking instructions both at your consultation and again when the herbs are being dispensed.

Drinking Herbs

The herbs taste bad!

Dose

The recommended dosage for you is specified on the cooking directions given at the appointment. However, as a general rule one should not try to force a larger dose than one feels comfortable with. If there is sediment at the bottom, do not stir it up before drinking. Let the sediment settle and just drink the more clear liquid above it.

Timing

Generally herbs are taken twice per day (see your cooking instructions for your own instructions) and may be taken whenever it is most convenient. For those with weak digestion, drinking the herbs after meals may be best.

Early pregnancy

In the nausea of early pregnancy, one should feel free to take as small a dose as needed to avoid vomiting. In most cases, pills are provided as an alternative if one simply cannot face the herbs on any given day.

Other tips

It is a good idea to hold your nose (seriously!) then keep holding your nose until you wash out your mouth or eat something small like a biscuit or piece of fruit. Strangely, some people find drinking the herbs through a straw avoids the taste.

Length of Treatment

We aim to bring the body and mind back into normal healthy functioning, as far as possible and as quickly as possible, using herbs and acupuncture. For recent or mild illnesses, the treatment is brief, sometimes even just two appointments. The longer the imbalance, the longer it will take to bring balance back.

The rule of thumb for conditions which have persisted for longer than four years is "one month of treatment for one year of problem." It is often surprising how people will expect instant results for a condition they have been developing for many years!

After relative balance and normal functioning has been restored, the last phase of treatment will be to consolidate this, usually employing easy-to-take pills, drops or powders, or less frequent acupuncture visits. One could say we need to eradicate the body's memory of its imbalance.

In fertility treatment, this is often the most burning question: How long will it take?! The simple answer is that it is often between six to twelve months. We cannot force a pregnancy, we can only ensure that the conditions are as optimal as possible for it to take place.

However, we have noticed that often (not always) it is those who ask the question most insistently who seem to take the longest to fall pregnant. We usually recommend fostering a sense of basic trust.

Basic trust may be trust that the universe does want you to fall pregnant, or trust in your body to function as it should (and sometimes a miscarriage is the right thing for the body to do), or trust that if something isn't working properly, there is a way to rectify it or at least improve it.

It is remarkable how fostering a sense of basic trust leads to a deep sense of relaxation throughout the body.

Fertility Treatment

Age Issues

Age is not such a big deal in Chinese medicine (within limits, of course) because we aim to improve egg quality with herbal treatment. However, egg quality is not the only factor in fertility. Many things have to come together in the right way and at the right time for conception to occur and a viable pregnancy develop. Chief amongst these, and the fastest to improve, is the condition of the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. Next is egg quality, followed by the proper functioning of ovulation, tubal patency and functioning, and then luteal phase stability, and of course sperm quality.

Some of these factors are de-emphasised in Western medicine fertility treatments because either not much can be done (eg to improve sperm quality, count or morphology) or because it will be handled artificially anyway (eg in IVF treatments).

Each of these areas is targeted specifically in Chinese medicine treatments for fertility, with the aim of achieving a natural pregnancy if at all possible.

How long will it take for me to fall pregnant?

See Length of treatment (above).

You may also like to view the document 'Steps Toward Settling Into Pregnancy'

[SEE: http://www.stevenclavey.com/docs/positive_steps_toward_settling_in_for_pregnancy.pdf]

Herbs and IVF

Herbs are fine during IVF procedures (for most fertility specialists in Australia, anyway). During the initial IVF try however we usually do not use herbs during the down regulation and stimulation phases, in order to determine the patient's baseline response to the IVF protocol.

Ideally we would like to see a patient for two or three months before beginning an IVF program, as this is the minimum amount of time needed to improve the endometrium, which is where the fertilized ovum has to implant. We believe that this investment of a few weeks pays big dividends in IVF success rates.

“Success Rates”

We have not measured our success rates at this clinic, as it is both expensive and surprisingly difficult to do so accurately. If you have doubts -- and doubts are usually healthy things to have -- it would perhaps be best to ask around friends and acquaintances for a word-of-mouth recommendation. You might be surprised who has heard about the clinic -- after twenty years in practice, word does spread.

Herbs in pregnancy

After close to two millennium of using, observing and recording the effects of herbs in human pregnancy, Chinese gynaecology has a very clear understanding of what can and cannot be used safely in pregnancy. In fact, there are three levels of herbs used in Chinese gynaecology:

1. Those herbs which should not be used in pregnancy;
2. Herbs that are quite safe in pregnancy;
3. Herbs that are not only safe, but beneficial to both mother and baby; these are known in traditional Chinese gynaecology as An Tai Yao 安胎药 "foetal-calming herbs".

In general during pregnancy we choose herbs only from the foetal-calming category, unless there is a specific need to use a herb from category two for a specific effect and a short time.

Herbs can be very effective for treating morning sickness and a wide variety of other problems in pregnancy,

including most discomforts a woman is told she "just has to live with" because "it's all part of being pregnant." It ain't necessarily so.

Acupuncture and IVF

The benefits of acupuncture in IVF treatment have been measured, however.

[SEE: http://www.stevenclavey.com/gyne_acupuncture.html]

Tinctures, Powders & Pills

How do I take my tincture?

Take the drops in water, it doesn't matter how much. Be sure to notice that the dosage is not in 'drops', but 'droppers'. To signal this we say "full droppers" but they don't have to be full all the way to the top of the dropper, half or three quarters is sufficient.

How do I take my herbal powder?

The powder does not dissolve in water, so it has to be taken straight. There are several ways to do this:

- A good way for children is to have a thin coat of apple sauce on a spoon, then add a little of the powder, then cover with applesauce and add *hundreds-and-thousands*. Make it a special treat.
- For adults, leave off the *hundreds-and-thousands*.
- Or — and this is the usual way — place the dose of powder on a piece of folded paper. Then take a sip of water, hold it in the mouth, then tip the powder onto the water where it will float for a second, before you tip your head back and let it slide down your throat, and chase it with another swallow of water.

That's the theory. Takes some practice.

Why do I have to take so many pills?

Often a prescription will call for ten to twelve pills to be taken AM & PM, and people are sometimes surprised at the number, since they are used to pharmaceutical drug forms of one or two tablets. On the one hand, these pills are quite small compared to the usual drug tablet, and on the other, these pills are not concentrated chemicals, they are simply plants, and a certain amount of plant material is needed before there will be an effect.

Some people have trouble swallowing pills, however; if this is the case inform your practitioner and an alternative can easily be arranged.

Why does the label on my pills tell me they treat one thing, when you prescribed them to me for something else?!

Labelling for all packaged medicines in Australia is restricted by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, and Chinese herbal pills have to be labelled as if they were Western over-the-counter drugs.

This means that a traditional formula which treats a wide range of problems, all of which stem from (for example) a "Liver" imbalance in Chinese medicine terms, cannot say this on the label, because the TGA is afraid that someone with a serious liver disease will try to treat themselves with the Chinese herbal pills instead of obtaining more suitable Western medicine treatment.

Thus usually one or two 'allowable' symptoms are chosen to represent the wide range of what the formula actually does treat. It *does* make it hard to explain to a man, though, why the pills which suit him best say "for PMT".

Learn more about restrictions on labelling.

[SEE: <http://www.tga.gov.au/docs/html/advrestr.htm>]

Practitioners

Steve Clavey

Steve has been practicing Chinese herbal medicine in Melbourne for over 20 years, specializing in women's disorders, particularly infertility and endometriosis. For more, see a brief CV:

[SEE: http://www.stevenclavey.com/docs/steven_clavey_cv.pdf]

Mary-Jo Bevin

After completing a Bachelor of Science with honours Mary-Jo studied Chinese medicine at RMIT university, obtaining a Bachelor of Applied Science in Chinese Medicine. Her final year was an internship at the Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Nanjing, China, with clinical training in gynaecology, internal medicine, paediatrics, dermatology, acupuncture and tuina.

Mary-Jo has a special interest and experience in acupuncture for gynaecology, especially infertility.

Davina Martin

Davina has obtained two degrees in Health Sciences (incorporating Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, cupping, massage and guasha) in Australia. She completed her clinical internship in Hangzhou, China, concentrating her time within the dermatology department.

How does Chinese medicine work?

It works very well.