

Support the Future with Fertility Massage

by Claire Marie Miller


Year after year, many women struggle to become pregnant—and when medical techniques fail them, many women turn to complementary methods, including fertility massage, to help them conceive.

Although fertility massage and fertility awareness both have long histories, modern women usually seek Western medical help to solve their challenges with conception. And while Western medical procedures are still the number-one choice among women, natural therapies, including massage, are gaining popularity.

“I was 46 years old, and my husband and I were attempting pregnancy through in vitro fertilization (IVF) with donor eggs,” recalls Laura Szpir of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “I received massages throughout our IVF attempts, and the third try was successful.

“I strongly believe [the massage] helped prepare my body, both mentally and physically, for our son Nikolas’s arrival,” she adds.

We entered a new era in conception with the first IVF procedure in late 1979. While science certainly has helped many women conceive during the last 30 years, women also want the option to get the help they need with natural and holistic methods to treat infertility. Healthy options like massage therapy and other forms of bodywork are available to women when pharmaceuticals and clinics alone cannot help them experience the joy of motherhood.

 Visit www.massagemag.com/marketfertility to read “How to Network with Fertility Experts in the Medical Realm,” by Carole Osborne.

A brief history of fertility massage

Massage to assist conception is rooted deeply in human history.

Mayan massage techniques have been practiced for thousands of years. This massage follows an ancient lineage, and it includes massaging the uterus to center it and support healthy conception and delivery. The ancient Chinese culture of more than 5,000 years ago harnessed the power of acupuncture to encourage conception. Ancient Celtic Beltane festivals were celebrated in early May, considered the most fertile time of year, and included fertility rituals.

Eggs, a nutrient-rich food, have long been a symbol of abundance and fertility that is associated with spring. This season is deemed a healthier time to conceive, with its increasing sunshine, full of vitamin D, now known to help promote hormonal health.

The first explorations of fertility awareness were intended to both promote and prevent conception. Charting one’s moon cycle, assessing vaginal mucous discharge and knowing when fertility was at its peak are all means of affecting conception.

Modern developments

The Billings Ovulation Method was developed by physicians John and Evelyn Billings of Australia more than 50 years ago. This method of charting a woman’s monthly cycle is a scientifically proven and completely natural way of either postponing or achieving conception. The method has been well documented and offers simple, noninvasive recordkeeping to assist in recognizing



patterns in hormonal secretions to help pinpoint problems for the client in her fertility health. It is recognized by the World Health Organization as 98.5-percent effective in determining the best time for conception, and is considered by many health care professionals to be an effective way to address supposed infertility. It has helped millions of couples conceive naturally.

A fertility massage therapist would benefit by understanding clients' chart cycles, when the best time is to perform fertility massage and which techniques are best at each point throughout the cycle.

Nurturing the Mother, my system of fertility massage, began with the conception of my second child, Jessica Hope, in 1984. My preparation with massage, castor oil packs and dietary cleansing used for Jessica's conscious conception eventually evolved into part of the Nurturing the Mother pregnancy massage certification in 1990. Nurturing the Mother, Fertility Massage Specialist has become its own workshop and certification due to the high demand for the advancement of natural fertility information and techniques.

A case study performed by Amanda Helms of Charlotte, North Carolina, focused on reducing the discomfort of endometriosis experienced by her client. Helms performed a fertility massage that included castor oil packs, craniosacral holds and reflexology over a four-month period. Reflexology stimulates specific organs, the reproductive and digestive systems, and the endocrine glands. Techniques performed on the feet help the practitioner stimulate the whole body to prepare for conception.

Helms' client, who had conceived years earlier

many respects," Umberger says. "First, physically, she reported that she was much more relaxed, and her irritable bowel symptoms calmed down significantly after the massage and castor oil packs. She learned about temperature, mucus and cervical checks, and listening to her body."

Massage therapist Sally Raspberry of Raleigh, North Carolina, cites her own conscious conception, and how her pregnancies with her two daughters fueled her passion to work with women from fertility massage through the entire process of pregnancy and birth. She feels this legacy of bringing in babies consciously, with the best possible start in health, supports generations yet to come. Raspberry says four out of five of her clients who received fertility massage became pregnant.

With the high cost of assisted reproductive technologies, fertility massage can be an affordable and healthy choice for a couple to explore. The best advice in encouraging a couple to pursue fertility massage is that it is an investment in their health, and even if they do not conceive, they will at least have improved their overall state of well-being.

Timing is key

A thorough knowledge of female anatomy and physiology are crucial to understanding hormonal rhythms and timing of the massage session. (Because of this, training in the Billings Ovulation Method would benefit the therapist desiring to provide fertility massage.) The female monthly cycle can vary greatly and is often out of balance for those having difficulty conceiving. Some women may not have a menstrual cycle, and others have 40-plus days between their

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with the assistance of IVF, became pregnant naturally about the fourth month of following this protocol, although this was not the intended outcome. Helms states, "The client showed 100-percent improvement during the course of the treatment with regard to eliminating pain with menstruation," and was delighted with her conception.

Massage therapist Heather Umberger of Richmond, Virginia, has also had successful experiences with fertility massage. Umberger says her current success rate is 60 percent. One of her clients, "Kristin," is an example.

"I believe [the fertility massage] protocol assisted Kristin in

cycles, so this is why it is important to understand what each client is dealing with.

The massage therapist may or may not be able to assist the client with the hormonal imbalances that can cause such variations. Reflexology, with its ability to intentionally work on the endocrine system through points on the feet, may assist in the stimulation of the glands that regulate hormonal function. Understanding what the client is going through helps the massage therapist better serve clients' needs, which may include referring them out to other health care professionals, such as an acupuncturist.

Following the woman's menstrual chart is critical, and massage is best performed prior to ovulation. The reason for this is the monthly hormonal rhythm begins with day one on

the first full day of bleeding. Monthly charting with the basal body temperature is used to determine the best time for conceiving or avoiding conception. This temperature is taken by the client upon waking in the morning, before she gets out of bed.

As the woman nears her time of conception, the chart will first dip and then rise dramatically. This reflects ovulation. Fertility massage is timed to receive between menstruation and ovulation, when the client is actively trying to conceive.

If the woman has conceived, the chart will demonstrate that with a temperature that will stay high. If she has not conceived, then the temperature will fall gradually until her time to bleed comes again. It is a benefit to the massage therapist to have an understanding of the monthly cycle and when it is the best time to suggest the client receive fertility massage.

Erring on the side of caution, a therapist generally does not provide massage after ovulation if the client is currently trying to conceive, because certain acupressure points can initiate labor—so the therapist waits until the next cycle to again perform the fertility massage.

It is also not advised to perform massage during menses while there is blood in the uterus, because the blood may be pulled up into the fallopian tubes and may cause blockages if it dries there. The optimal timing for massage therapy is between menstruation and ovulation.

As you begin to see clients who are receiving assisted reproductive technologies to support their potential to conceive, you will need to understand what they are receiving in terms of hormonal supplements, as well as the procedures and timing of it all. Timing is everything with fertility work, both natural and technological.

For example, when the client receives hormone injections, the massage therapist will need to stop working the endocrine system in the reflexology portion of the session. Also, abdominal massage will need to be gentle when injections are given in the abdomen. Understanding such procedures as they arise is important so the massage therapist can adjust her session accordingly.

The fertility industry is continually changing procedures and techniques. Your clients are an excellent resource for information, since they tend to want to completely understand what is occurring through the fertility work they are receiving from their medical specialists.

Assist in conception

Any massage training that focuses on the abdomen and energy center of the lower belly with massage has the potential to assist in conception.

Fertility massage creates a relaxation response for the whole body. Many of the clients seen for fertility massage often have digestive problems, such as irritable bowel syndrome and constipation, and massage alleviates these conditions. Massage also stimulates digestion, which in turn assists in blood flow, hormonal balance and increased libido.

Fertility massage is an affordable, healthy alternative or complement to assisted reproductive technologies that can support generations yet to come.

Claire Marie Miller's massage career began in 1979; she has since become well known for her 32-year expertise in the field of pregnancy, fertility, labor, postpartum and infant/child massage. Miller created the Nurturing the Mother pregnancy massage certification and the Fertility Massage Specialist certification. She also offers Integrative Reflexology whole-hand method, with her own easy-to-read and use charts. For more information, visit www.clairemariemiller.com. **M**

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