

Why male fertility support is taking me to Everest!

Like many of us, I see a lot of clients going through fertility struggles. In fact, I very specifically target this market as it's an area I love working in. And I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that the majority of my fertility clients are women, despite the fact that 50 per cent of fertility issues sit with men.

What about the men?

It was in an ACT (Acupuncture Childbirth Team) meeting a couple of years ago that a little light bulb went on in my mind. Why aren't men stepping forward for treatment? Why aren't men getting the support they need? So, I set about exploring the realm of male fertility.

I spoke with clients' husbands to start getting an understanding of what it's like from their side. I then began to invite men in alongside their partners when they come for my 'discovery' consultation. But although this was great and allowed me to start helping more men, it was a slow burn.

Then came the dreaded lockdown! Clinic ground to a halt and it was time to rethink how I was working and what I was offering. I quickly developed a new series of remote support programmes and found I was able to get results simply through phone consultations and other resources I'd been working on. What I've discovered is that with lifestyle and dietary advice and helping people create positive change in their lives, they've still got amazing results without any actual treatment with acupuncture. I recently worked with a guy whose sperm count went from 8 million to 28 million just from our remote work together. It's really opened my eyes to new ways of working and the potential to help even more people.

Irresistible invitation

A few weeks into lockdown I got an email from Fertility Network UK asking if I was interested in hosting an online support group for men – an incredible opportunity which I jumped at. At our first meeting in April we had 30 guys join us for an hour and a half. Since then we've held monthly meetings, with 15 to 20 guys each time, and I've gained great insight into what it's like for a man going through fertility struggles, to discover you can't father your own child and how challenging giving a sperm sample can really be!

The more I heard, the more it confirmed what I had been thinking – men don't get the support they need. The whole system is skewed towards women – through no fault of theirs – leaving men feeling isolated and vulnerable. They lack advice, guidance, support and understanding, and while some guys don't want to talk or open up, for those who do there's nothing out there. GPs don't help and the IVF clinics are just happy if they have some sperm to work with regardless of what the man might be going through.

As acupuncturists we have an exceptional set of skills at our disposal that can be hugely valuable to men with fertility issues. Of course, getting them into the clinic to even talk is no mean feat and I won't profess to have the answer to that just yet. However, if we can encourage more men to open up and step forward for help, then we can offer them something unique. What they need most is advice and clarity about what they should and shouldn't be doing – lifestyle, diet, stress, and in some cases direction as to what to do next medically.

Even if men don't buy into acupuncture, that's fine with me – we can still offer all the other elements that come alongside our physical treatment. For example, I recently worked with a guy remotely, who

through phone sessions, support videos and documents has cut out caffeine, alcohol, changed his exercise patterns, lost weight, got more energy, improved sleep and gained a far better understanding of his fertility. None of which he was getting from his IVF clinic.

There's still such a stigma around male fertility, and thinking outside of the box of physical treatment does allow us to offer men something different which may suit them better. The recent Chris Hughes documentary was incredible and there's a great documentary on Amazon called 'The Easy Bit'. Both are a must watch if you're working with fertility clients.

Heading for #BaseCampforFertility

But there's more to be done, and as you can probably tell, I'm on a mission! I want to raise awareness about the lack of male fertility support and I want to make sure men start getting what they need. So I've come up with an incredible challenge... a trek to Everest base camp! And not just me – I'm looking to pull together a team of 15 to 20 guys who have been affected by fertility issues to come with me. Our aim, to raise awareness and money for Fertility Network UK, the nation's leading fertility charity providing free and impartial support, advice, information and understanding for anyone affected.

Our trip is scheduled for March 2022 and there's a lot that needs to happen between now and then. I've set myself an ambitious target of £6,000, which will really make a difference for the charity. I'm also incredibly grateful to Balance and JCM for really stepping up and getting behind me on this mission – we'll be working together to spread the word amongst our community and use this opportunity to champion the work that we all do in supporting anyone with fertility issues.

You too can help!

I'd love for news of our trip to spread as wide and as far as possible, so please tell your friends, family and clients. If you have any media contacts, I'm happy to talk to anyone, anywhere! And of course, all donations will be very welcome.

To find out more, head over to my [Base Camp for Fertility page](#)