



David Cherry, O.M.D., L.Ac.

# THE BABY WHISPERER

DR. DAVID CHERRY HAS BUILT A THRIVING PRACTICE  
USING ACUPUNCTURE TO HELP WOMEN BECOME PREGNANT.

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by JESSICA LASKEY

photography by BETH BAUGHER

**D**r. David Cherry says there are three distinct misconceptions about acupuncture that he'd like to dispel right here and now.

"The number one thing people think about acupuncture is that it hurts," Cherry says, seated on a stool in one of the tranquil treatment rooms in his Roseville office (he practices in both Sacramento, on Scripps Drive, and in Roseville, on Smith Lane). "People hear 'needle' and think 'Aah!' It doesn't have to hurt. The patient may feel a tiny pinprick when the needles enter the skin. After that, there should be little to no sensation at all."

Misconception number one down. Number two?

"The needles don't go into your nerves," Cherry says. "Western medicine has put out the information that the needles touch your nerves—that just isn't true."

And the third inaccuracy he deals with daily?

"Acupuncture has nothing to do with a belief system," he says, then grins bemusedly. "It's not based on a religion. You don't have to believe in it for it to work."

Belief systems aside, Dr. Cherry has hundreds of devotees—women who assert that acupuncture helped them to conceive, many of whom were struggling to get and stay pregnant prior to his treatments.

Cherry is what's known as an acupuncture fertility specialist: He and his colleagues at The Acupuncture Clinics of David D. Cherry, O.M.D., L.Ac. and Associates use acupuncture to treat all functional aspects of infertility, such as advanced maternal age, endometriosis, luteal phase defect, polycystic ovarian syndrome, premature ovarian failure and unexplained infertility. He's been so successful that he has repeat business—women who have had two or three children thanks to his methods in conjunction with Western fertility treatments such as IVF (in vitro fertilization) and IUI (intrauterine insemination). Some fertility clinics in town even recommend his services.



“The general rule of thumb is that if a patient is suffering from a functional disorder, acupuncture can help,” Cherry explains. “If it’s a structural or anatomical disorder—say, the patient has no fallopian tubes—it won’t be of much help.”

For me (as I assume for many people who have encountered acupuncture only in movie scenes and questionable YouTube videos), the practice conjures up corny images of people lying facedown on a massage table in an incense-scented, candlelit room while sitar-laden tunes compete with the voice of a ministering medic or medicine man who has made the patient’s back resemble a hedgehog, porcupine or particularly fleshy pincushion. While certain elements remain (the table and the music, for example), the reality of what Cherry and his fellow acupuncturists do couldn’t be further from that misguided stereotype.

Acupuncture and traditional Asian herbal medicine, often used in conjunction, make up the oldest medical system in the world, dating back to at least 300 B.C. Acupuncture involves the insertion of hair-thin needles into points in the skin that, once stimu-

lated, can correct the balance of qi (pronounced either “chee” or “kee”), or energy, flowing through meridians, or channels, in the body. Improving the balance and flow of qi can bring about great health benefits, including reduced stress and pain—and in some patients, fertility.

## Cherry’s practice is 95 percent fertility—and he couldn’t be happier that he’s in the business of babies.

“It all comes back to qi,” Cherry says. “That’s really the crux of the biscuit. You can put it in any terms you want—however it makes sense to you—but it’s all about pelvic blood circulation and the balance of energy.”

Both men and women seek Cherry’s help with that balance and blood flow. For men, acupuncture can increase sperm count; for women, it not only

can increase the efficacy of IVFs and IUIs but also ease the anxiety they experience during these treatments by encouraging the body to release endorphins—those “feel good” chemicals you get after exercise or a particularly good chocolate bar.

Though acupuncture has gained a foothold with the medical establishment in recent years—health care giants such as Kaiser Permanente have added it to their roster of available treatment options—that wasn’t always the case. It wasn’t until 2003 that the World Health Organization’s Department of Essential Drugs and Medicine Policy produced a report that contained a list of conditions and symptoms for which it believed acupuncture had proven to be an effective treatment. The National Health Service of the United Kingdom has come out in support of “some scientific evidence that acupuncture is effective for a small number of health conditions,” but it concedes that “because of disagreements over the way acupuncture trials should be carried out and over what their results mean, this evidence does not allow us to draw definite conclusions.”

Cherry, on the other hand, has seen a noticeable shift in the tide.

“In the early 1980s, I was regularly called a quack to my face,” he says. (Cherry has been licensed to practice acupuncture since 1985, when the method was still hotly and publicly debated and regularly debated.) “I had some doctors call me and tell me to keep my hands off their patients. I think [the mistrust of acupuncture] was born out of ignorance more than anything else. When studies started showing its success, doctors were still skeptical. They would say, ‘Well, it won’t hurt you . . .’ but they wouldn’t say it helped, either.”

Perhaps Cherry was more open-minded than most because of his personal experience with the practice. In the late 1970s, Cherry was working as a municipal building inspector and was being treated—“very successfully”—with acupuncture for chronic migraines by “an old German guy” who had been a neurosurgeon in Germany prior to World War II. When the good doctor decided to retire, he insisted that Cherry take over his practice.

“I said, ‘Me? But I don’t know anything about it,’” Cherry recalls, widening his denim-blue eyes and cracking a grin beneath his white beard. “He told me I’d have to go to school. He had an application and a course catalogue waiting for me in his office and he wouldn’t let me leave until I had applied. He was not the kind of person you say ‘no’ to, so I did it. When I got accepted (to California Acupuncture College in Santa Barbara, now the Santa Barbara College of Oriental Medicine), I said, ‘Well, I guess I’m going.’ And it’s turned out to be the best job in the world.”

Once he graduated as a Doctor of Oriental Medicine and became licensed for his newfound calling, Cherry practiced in San Luis Obispo for six years before making the move to Sacramento.

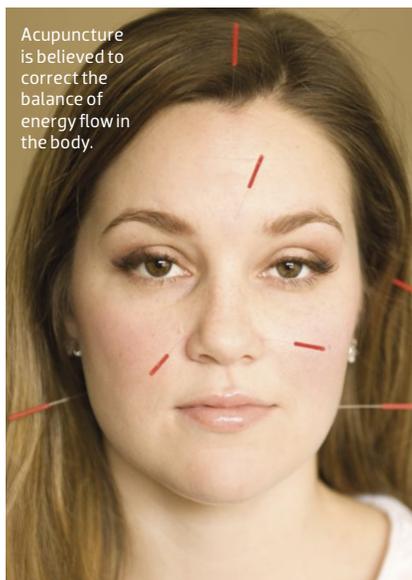
“I needed a bigger market,” he says. “Suddenly, the whole profession exploded and there were too many acupuncturists down there. I was

an associate here for only two years before I was able to open my own practice in 1992.”

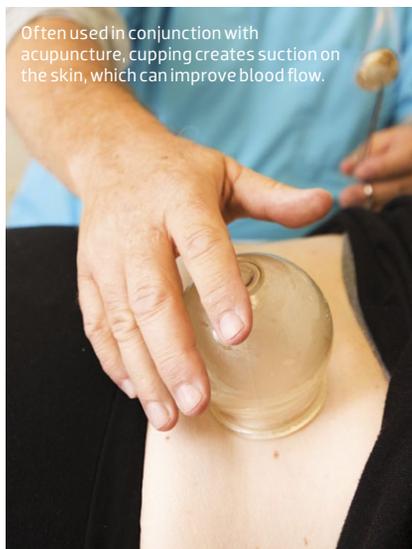
Though acupuncture certainly has gained ground in the years since his training, Cherry didn’t mind residing just outside the medical establishment.

“I liked being a renegade—the red-headed stepchild of medicine,” Cherry says with a rumbling chuckle. “We’ve come so far—I’d say 90 percent of the way—in accepting and integrating acupuncture, but I’m a fan of keeping [Eastern and Western medicine] separate. With the bigger companies offering acupuncture, they’re not using the same techniques it took someone like me thousands of hours to perfect. Now there’s so much integration that the lines can get blurred.”

One thing that isn’t obscured, however, is the success rates of Cherry’s patients. He uses the modalities of acupuncture (though trained in both



Acupuncture is believed to correct the balance of energy flow in the body.



Often used in conjunction with acupuncture, cupping creates suction on the skin, which can improve blood flow.

Japanese and Chinese methods, he opts for the Japanese style for infertility and women’s health issues due to its use of thinner needles and slightly different insertion methods) in tandem with traditional Asian herbal medicine to increase the likelihood of conception for patients both participating in assisted reproductive technology (such as IVF) and those who are trying to conceive naturally. His practice is now 95 percent fertility—he still has the occasional outlier left from his days as a pain management specialist—and he couldn’t be happier that he’s now in the business of babies.

“Pain management is a great thing to do,” Cherry says. “I did general practice acupuncture for 13 or 14 years, and helping someone relieve their pain is wonderful. But when you help someone have a child—that’s a profound impact. Imagine the gravity of that! I had a patient who had been receiving fertility acupuncture treatments from a doctor in Great Britain but she was now being seen here. She asked me, ‘If he tells you what to do, can you do it?’ I said sure, and she was doing so well that more and more women started being referred to me. It’s such a gratifying reaction when you help someone conceive—it moves me so much [to see] how happy they are, jumping up and down. I feel completely honored and privileged to be a part of that; it’s so beyond what I expected for my life.”

While those happy, leaping pregnant women are certainly perks of the job, Cherry believes that the benefits of treatment—he still gets regular acupuncture himself—speak for themselves.

“There’s a great preponderance of evidence that acupuncture works,” Cherry says. “You can pull up studies on the Internet all day long about how it can ease injuries, etc. But when you think about it, life is an injury, so if you could spend half an hour being profoundly relaxed and come out feeling better, why not? You’re bound to get something out of it.”