

## Female Infertility and Herbal Medicine

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### Abstract

The causes of female infertility are multifaceted, and may extend to either of the partners or even both. Indeed, the root issues of infertility can be related to both sexes: approximately 50 percent of infertility is caused by female conditions, while approximately 40 percent is male related. It is also worth noting that in 25 percent of infertile couples both partners will have a fertility problem. Herbs originate from plants and plant extracts from a wide variety of natural resources, including plant leaves, bark, flowers, roots, and fruits and berries. Evidence based herbal medicine may present an effective treatment for female infertility. In this review we present some solid evidence for role of herbal medicine in the treatment of female infertility.

**Keywords:** Alternative medicine, Female, Herbal Medicine, Infertility

## Introduction

Infertility is a condition that affects approximately 1 out of every 6 couples. An infertility diagnosis is given to a couple that has been unsuccessful in efforts to conceive over the course of one full year. When the cause of infertility exists within the female partner, it is referred to as female infertility. Female infertility factors contribute to approximately 50% of all infertility cases, and female infertility alone accounts for approximately one-third of all infertility cases. Unexplained infertility is a term we hear a lot in the reproductive world. Basically it is the term used when there is no found cause for infertility. Usually a couple has gone through all of the testing available and everything comes back clear. A diagnosis of unexplained infertility is given to about 25% of couples with infertility [1-4].

## Infertility Symptoms in Women

In women, changes in the menstrual cycle and ovulation may be a symptom of a disease related to infertility. Symptoms include:

- Abnormal periods. Bleeding is heavier or lighter than usual.
- Irregular periods. The number of days in between each period varies each month.
- No periods.
- Painful periods. Back pain, Pelvic pain, and cramping may happen.

Sometimes, female infertility is related to a hormone problem. In this case, symptoms can also include:

- Skin changes, including more acne
- Changes in sex drive and desire

- Dark hair growth on the lips, chest, and chin
- Loss of hair or thinning hair
- Weight gain [1-4]

## Diagnosis of female infertility

Investigating suspected infertility requires tests for both the woman and her partner. Tests for the woman may include:

- Physical examination – including medical history
- Blood tests – to check for the presence of ovulation hormones
- Laparoscopy – a ‘keyhole’ surgical procedure in which an instrument is inserted through a small incision in the abdomen so that the reproductive organs can be examined
- Ultrasound scans – to check for the presence of fibroids.

Infertility may be caused by an underlying medical condition that damages the fallopian tubes, interferes with ovulation, or causes hormonal complications. These medical conditions include:

- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Endometriosis
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Premature ovarian failure
- Uterine fibroids

## Treatment

Treatment for infertility should first address any underlying medical condition that may be contributing to fertility problems. If this step does not restore fertility, there are several treatment approaches:



- Lifestyle measures (such as maintaining a healthy weight, quitting smoking, timing sexual activity with regard to the ovulation cycle)
- Drugs to induce ovulation, such as clomiphene and gonadotrophins
- Assisted reproductive technologies (ART), such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) [5-7]

### Herbs and fertility

Herbal remedies have long been used to address problems with fertility. In fact, evidence of the use of herbal remedies for female and male fertility dates all the way back to 200 A.D. These fertility herbal remedies are made out of special plants and plant extracts believed to have a positive effect on the reproductive organs, hormonal system, and sex drive. They are taken by men and women who wish to increase their chances of conception, as well as by couples that are facing fertility difficulties. Herbal remedies for fertility can help to address such fertility problems as:

- hormonal imbalance
- irregular menstruation
- erectile dysfunction
- sperm motility problems [8-9]

People around the world have experimented with herbal medicine for centuries. Today, it's being increasingly used in the West to treat women and men who experience infertility. Still, the science is thin and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine suggests there is little evidence to support the notion that herbs can increase your fertility. Nevertheless, through evidence base herbal

medicine (clinical Trial), we can present some solid evidence [10-15].

Experiencing infertility is emotionally painful for any woman and can lead to anxiety, isolation, extended periods of depression, and an inability to concentrate on daily tasks.

With techniques such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) or surrogacy, many women struggling with infertility are eventually able to have a child. However, these techniques are very expensive and some women simply cannot afford them.

There are natural and herbal treatments that also can help fight the root cause of infertility and increase chances of getting pregnant. Lifestyle factors, such as regular exercise and following a healthy diet, can also help [16-17].

### Ashwagandha

Ashwagandha, also called Indian ginseng, is very helpful for women having difficulty conceiving. This herb is effective in maintaining hormonal balance and promoting proper functioning of the reproductive organs. It also helps tone the uterus for those who have recurrent miscarriages [18-20].

### Pomegranate

Pomegranate also boosts fertility in women. It helps increase blood flow to the uterus and thickens the uterine lining to reduce the chance of miscarriage. Plus, it promotes healthy development of the fetus [18-20].

### Cinnamon

Cinnamon can help with proper ovarian functioning and thus be effective in fighting infertility. It even helps in the treatment of

PCOS, one of the main causes of infertility.

A 2007 study published in the *Fertility and Sterility* journal showed that cinnamon supplementation can help improve menstrual cyclicality in women with PCOS.

It is also used to treat problems such as endometriosis, uterine fibroids and amenorrhea (absence of menstrual periods) that can affect a woman's fertility. Plus, cinnamon may help prevent yeast infections [18-20].

### **Chasteberry**

If infertility is due to a hormonal imbalance in the body, an effective remedy is chasteberry, also called vitex [18-20].

This herb helps improve ovulation due to its high prolactin levels. Plus, it combats PCOS.

### **Dates**

Dates contain several nutrients that can help boost your ability to conceive. They are rich in vitamins A, E and B as well as iron and other minerals and that are essential for a woman to conceive and to carry a child through a full-term pregnancy [18-20].

### **Maca Root**

Another effective herb that can treat infertility in both women and men is the maca root. This herb boosts normal hormone production and is particularly beneficial for

women with hypothyroidism as it supports thyroid function.

It is also a good source of different nutrients that boost fertility [18-20].

### **What are the risks associated with herbal remedies?**

Just because herbal medicines come from natural plant sources does not mean they aren't dangerous if taken incorrectly. Like traditional medications, herbal remedies can create a variety of reactions, and interact negatively with other herbs, prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs. Herbal remedies are not monitored by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and may cause the following side effects to occur:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Seizure
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Dry mouth
- Cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Elevated blood pressure
- Anxiety
- Irregular heartbeat
- Insomnia [20].

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