

Yoga and Infertility

The answer to that question seems to be a resounding “yes” for couples who took part in a program supervised by Sachdev at St. Peter’s Medical Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey, which was based on the ongoing programs at the Mind-Body Institute at Harvard University created by Herbert Benson, M.D., researcher and author of *The Relaxation Response* (Wholecare, 2000). The program incorporated stress reduction practices like yoga and meditation, emotional support such as group discussions and sharing, and changes in diet, including cutting down on caffeine, alcohol, fats, and sugar.

The results were remarkable: Couples had a 50 percent fertility rate within one year of finishing the program. What made the results even more astounding is that regardless of the cause of the woman’s inability to conceive, whether it was unexplained infertility or low sperm counts, participants were helped in encouragingly high numbers.

Other recent evidence echoes the positive effects of yoga for infertile women. In 2000, Harvard Medical School researcher Alice Domar, Ph.D., published the results of a study in *Fertility and Sterility* (Vol. 73, No. 4) that showed women who participated in her program, which included relaxation and yoga, were almost three times more likely to get pregnant than women who didn’t. In Domar’s 10-week mind-body workshop, 184 infertile women who had been trying to get pregnant for one to two years were put into a cognitive behavioral group. This group received methods for emotional expression, nutrition and exercise information, and relaxation training—including yoga, meditation, muscle relaxation, and imagery. Interestingly, the group also learned cognitive restructuring, identifying recurrent negative thoughts, such as “I will never have a baby” and changing that thought to “I am doing everything I can to get pregnant.” The results: 55 percent of the women in the group using yoga and other techniques got pregnant within a year, in contrast with 20 percent of the women in the control group who conceived in that same time period.