



THE NATIONAL INFERTILITY ASSOCIATION

Summer 2005

Long Island Chapter

A Newsletter for RESOLVE members about
Infertility, Education, Advocacy & Support

Volume 10, Issue 3

In This Issue

Feature

Mind Over Matter cover

Chapter Information and Member Benefits.....	2
President's Message	3
Between a Rock and a Hard Place	4
Recent Advances in the Diagnosis & Treatment of Recurrent Pregnancy Loss	5
Holistic Fertility Center Opens on Long Island	6
Putting Everything on Hold Until You Have a Baby	7
LI Chapter Lending Library	8
Acupuncture: Why It Works	9
Navigating the Grief of Infertility	11
Top 10 List of What Not to Say to the Infertile	12
Forgive But Never Forget (Adoption)	13
Coping Column (Adoption)	15
Good News: Adoption Fares	15
Elevated FSH and Expecting	16
Upcoming Resolve Chats	17
Volunteer Opportunities	19
Questions to Ask: Alternative Medicine	20
Just Relax	21
Peer-Led Groups (Support)	22

Index of Advertisers

Currentfun.com	10
iGive.com	10
Vermont Teddy Bear	10
East Coast Fertility	12
North Shore Hospital	14
Dish Babies	17
Kings Pharmacy	18
SCSA	19
NYU Donor Egg Program	21
Organon (Follistim Pen)	21
Long Island IVF	22
Rockville Centre Pharmacy	23
Join/Renew Resolve	Back Cover

Mind Over Matter

By Janet E. Mueller, Psy.D. and Lynn Pickus, Psy.D.

Imagine a day spent with your infertility specialist monitoring your follicular growth and receiving injections laced with fertility drugs. Imagine how you would feel as insemination day looms and well-meaning people tell you, "just relax." You ask yourself how anyone with so much at stake could relax, given all the increasing tension.

In our opinion, it is virtually impossible to turn off the stress response and relax. You need to learn techniques to accomplish this. Here is where the mind/body connection comes into play. Let us begin by raising the question: What do we mean by the mind/body connection? Scientists believe that the mind and body are connected. They are not two separate entities. Thoughts cause feelings which have a physiologic effect upon the body. Depressed feelings can cause a slowing down of bodily systems. When we speak about mind/body techniques we are talking about the methods we use to change our behavior or physiology in order to promote health. A state of deep relaxation and peace of mind should be attained by using any one of these techniques.

How does the mind/body connection have any relevance for infertility patients? What is of major interest for this population is the link between stress and fertility problems. As documented in Alice Domar's book, *Healing Mind, Healthy Woman*, in certain cases stress can compromise fertility. Stress can cause irregular ovulation, tubal spasms, and hormonal shifts, all compromising ovulation and implantation. In males it can cause a significant drop in sperm count and quality.

The link between stress and the body in infertile individuals has been recently pieced together by scientists. They have noted that the hypothalamus, a structure in the brain, controls the flow and timing of reproductive hormones. It is also responsible for producing hormones in response to stress. The same portion of the brain is responsible for both functions. Stress can disrupt the normal orchestration of reproductive hormones. Additionally nerve fibers connect the brain and reproductive organs directly providing another avenue by which emotional stress may disrupt the normal function in both men and women.

Although stress can clearly affect reproductive physiology, little evidence exists that stress alone can cause lasting infertility. Since infertility itself causes tension and stress, a vicious circle can easily occur. The stress of dealing with infertility may worsen the physiological process.

Mind Over Matter...cont'd from page 1

There are a variety of mind/body techniques which can be adopted in order to reduce one's stress level. They can include meditation, yoga, prayer, progressive muscle relaxation, body scan, visual imagery, qi gong, autogenic training, and cognitive restructuring.

We will now review a few of these mind/body techniques. A number of these techniques are based on breath focus. The most basic of these is called breath focus. When we are stressed, we tend to take shallow breaths. This deprives the body of oxygen and causes our heart rate to increase. Blood pressure also increases. In order to remediate this you need to take deep abdominal breaths rather than shallow chest breaths. Deep breathing helps to elicit the relaxation response.

When practicing meditation, proper breathing is essential. Meditation is meant to assist people in finding a state of mental and physical calmness. One goal is to try to remove the clutter from your mind so that you can focus better. This technique is not for everyone, especially for those individuals who find it anxiety-provoking to sit with their own thoughts. When you meditate, you should find a quiet place and sit in a comfortable position. You begin by concentrating on your breath and then repeating a focusing word or phrase. The point of meditation is to focus your attention inward.

Prayer is another mind/body technique. For those more spiritually inclined, prayer may be a more appropriate form of meditation. It can be used specifically to elicit the relaxation response. This can be accomplished when it is practiced in a fashion similar to meditation, whereby you use a repetitive word or phrase.

Yoga is one of the oldest mind/body techniques. It includes breath focus, body postures, and stretching. It is often helpful for women who have racing thoughts.

Guided imagery is a technique which requires you to visualize a scene, experience, or place that evokes a feeling of inner calm. It can be practiced by listening to a tape that provides peaceful and calming visions, or conjuring up your own calming images, which may include holding your new born. Breath focus is also incorporated into this exercise.

Finally cognitive restructuring is based on the premise that thoughts cause feelings which cause physiological responses in our bodies. Our thoughts effect our feelings and how we behave. Each of us talks to ourselves by way of our thoughts. This is referred to as self-talk. Women who have been experiencing a number of years of infertility treatment often have very negative and self-punitive self-talk. This may include "I'm never going to have a baby, and I'm just wasting my money." The purpose of cognitive restructuring is to modify our thoughts by building up a more realistic and healthier mindset.

These are just a few mind/body techniques which we have highlighted here. Individuals should choose a strategy which they find personally meaningful to their experience. Although it is only recently that researchers such as Dr. Alice Domar have found these techniques helpful in lowering infertile women's anxiety and depression, the strategies have been in existence for a very long time and are quite acclaimed for addressing a gamut of problems.

Dr. Janet Mueller and Dr. Lynn Pickus are licensed psychologists who are affiliated with East Coast Fertility. They both counsel individuals who are dealing with fertility issues. Both psychologists utilize mind/body techniques when counseling infertility patients. Dr. Mueller has a private practice in Plainview and Syosset, Long Island. For more information, she can be reached at (516) 822-6212. Dr. Pickus has a private practice in Hicksville, Long Island, and can be reached at (516) 932-1952.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

By Janetti Marotta, PhD

Infertility can plummet one into a state of having no control while needing to exercise tremendous control. Too often, the harder you try, the more responsibly you act, the higher your hopes, the deeper your disappointment. Just when you need to stop and grieve the loss of a pregnancy or failed cycle, you need to move forward because the biological clock is ticking, ticking, ticking. What do you do?

Stuck between a rock and a hard place, one must nevertheless find a solution, a third path. But how do you find your personal route through infertility? Specific medical issues, personal history, and couple dynamics create a unique mix.

While infertility poses a huge intellectual challenge, don't forget that other source of guidance, your feelings. Give room to whatever feelings exist within you. Allow your feelings to be heard; listen to them; nurture them with unconditional acceptance; hold onto them; and share them. By honoring where you are in the grieving process, you are creating a larger space between that rock and hard place. There, you will find room to see, and to understand, the meaning that will support you through this crisis. Give room to your feelings, and you will find options you never imagined. Remember: The heart has room for everything.

Janetti Marotta, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist with a private practice in Palo Alto, CA.

Reprinted from The Northern California Chapter of RESOLVE, Spring 2000