

## Hypnosis for Couples Facing Infertility Stress

We've all heard it before haven't we, how stress impacts fertility. The medical world is actually split as to whether stress causes infertility, however there is no doubt that infertility is stressful and it can impact your chances of success whether it is the cause or not. One study has demonstrated that the stress levels in infertile women are on par with women suffering from cancer, AIDS or heart disease(1). No-one tells them just to relax and it'll be all OK!

As you probably know, reproduction is one of the most delicate systems in our body. Your mind can affect your ability to get pregnant on multiple levels. The hypothalamus in your brain helps control the levels of key fertility hormones LH and FSH through the pituitary gland (also in your brain). The pituitary gland regulates both how much of a hormone is made and how much is released in the body. Changes to its response can have dramatic effect on the delicate cocktail of hormones necessary for ovulation, fertilization, fallopian tube functioning and even successful implantation of the egg. In men testosterone and sperm production are also regulated by the hormones LH and FSH and are thus affected by the workings of the pituitary gland.

As well as controlling these key fertility hormones the hypothalamus is also responsible for regulating the pituitary and adrenal responses which produce and regulate the level of stress hormones in your body. When the human mind perceives that it is undergoing a stressful event it sets off an alarm reaction initiated by the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus immediately recruits both the pituitary gland at the base of the brain and the adrenal glands situated on top of the kidneys. These glands immediately begin to flood the bloodstream with a cocktail of stress hormones including adrenaline to prepare the body for what is referred to as the 'fight-or-flight' response. Non-critical functions of the body are shut down to focus the mind and body in escaping from the threat.

Hypnosis can help you let go of stress and find a sense of peace and wellbeing regardless of what is going on in your life. It helps you switch off the noise of thought and roller-coaster of emotions that flood through you and find a place of peace. A place where your mind and body can let go of the stress and tension stored within it.

### 7-11 Breathing Relaxation Technique:

This technique utilizes a natural biological relaxation process (increasing the amount of carbon dioxide you breathe in) as well as bringing your mind to the present moment. Focusing on your breathing brings you back to the 'here and now' rather than time traveling to the future worrying about the next pregnancy test or fertility treatment outcomes.

Simply concentrate on your breathing and count from 1-7 as you breathe in and from 1-11 as you exhale.

You can count out loud or in your head but if possible out loud can make it more effective.

It doesn't need to be big breaths, relaxed breathing adjusting the pace of the counting to your breath.

Alternatively many people find it more comfortable to count from 1 to 3 and 1 to 5 instead of 7 & 11, play with it and find which feels more natural for you.

After 10-15 breaths you may start to notice how much more relaxed you're beginning to feel.

If your mind wanders just bring it gently back to your breath. The beauty of this exercise is that you can do it any time, any place without anyone knowing what you are doing.

Learning to relax can help you moment to moment and improve your fertility however hypnosis can also go beyond relaxation. There is a wealth of research demonstrating the mind-body connection and how your mind can affect your body physically. A study carried out by the Learner Institute in 2003 demonstrated this power of visualization. A group of volunteers visualized exercising their little finger over a period of 12 weeks and their muscle strength had improved by 35% and continued improving to 40% four weeks after the study and training had ended – without lifting a finger!(2) This is an example of how your mind can affect your body. I often use it for healing myself and of course utilize it with my clients.

Epigenetics is now demonstrating how cell (including human cells) functions are shaped by their environment and how our thoughts and beliefs affect us at the cellular level. This is the science behind the placebo effect where your belief can give the same results as medication. The same is true with the 'nocebo' effect, where negative thoughts and beliefs can affect your biology – and thus chances of success.

A recent study lead by Alice Domar at Boston IVF studied 100 women undergoing IVF treatment. 52% of the women who completed the mind-body program for infertility were successful the IVF cycle compared to 20% of the control group.(3) This is a statistically significant difference. Another study of 185 woman by Professor Levitas of Soroka Hospital Israel found that 28% of the women who were hypnotised for the IVF treatment became pregnant, compared to 14% of the women in the control group.(4)

Hypnosis can help you actively harness this mind-body link through visualization and hypnotic suggestion. Your unconscious mind controls all your body functions and processes and you can guide it to what you want it to do. It can help you whether trying to conceive naturally or undergoing fertility treatment and compliments other support/treatments such as herbs, nutrition or acupuncture.