



“I should have been a fertility goddess, but instead I found myself struggling to conceive.”

Fertility expert *Mary Wong* had helped countless women get pregnant. But after she discovered her own inability to conceive, she chose to venture into unknown territory.

“**W**hy the hell can’t I get pregnant?” I asked myself numerous times every day. I was happy and led a healthy life: I ate organic food, I didn’t smoke, I didn’t drink coffee or alcohol. I prided myself in never getting sick. Both of my grandmothers had children at age 46. I should have been a fertility goddess, but instead I found myself struggling to conceive when I was ready to have a family at 38.

Adding insult to injury, I am a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine who specializes in fertility. I’d helped countless women and couples conceive. I felt like a fraud being unable to get pregnant myself.

In my quest to have a child, I practised yoga, I walked and meditated, and I took Chinese medicines and supplements. From acupuncture to hypnotherapy and colonic therapy—you name it, I tried it. Two years passed and I had no baby to show for my efforts. So, with much reluctance, I decided it was time to explore what was, for me, uncharted territory: conventional medicine.

At first, I was convinced that the beer- and wine-drinking habits of my husband, Jean-Louis, were the root cause of our infertility. After all, our fertility doctor warned us that alcohol can be associated with a decrease in normal sperm formation. Yet when we tested him, he had a stellar sperm count of over 100 million per millilitre, 20 million being on the low end of the “normal” spectrum. My husband was a proud and virile superstar, but I was secretly disappointed, because it meant our problems had to do with me.

Sure enough, after months of testing, the doctor confirmed that both of my fallopian tubes were blocked and fluid-filled, a condition called bilateral hydrosalpinges. To my dismay, this was the one condition I’d never had success treating in my own practice. I found it to be a cruel cosmic joke: Seemingly overnight, I’d joined the ranks of the many women who came to my clinic for help. Did this make me less of a woman and a practitioner? Was I an overall failure in life? After nearly two decades in practice, I’d witnessed most of my patients eventually go on to have children, but knowing that didn’t alleviate my stress. When all was said and done, no matter how supersonic my husband’s sperm were, they would never be able to meet my eggs without considerable help.

Conception in a petri dish was not how I’d envisioned making a baby, but that was exactly what we did. I stepped outside my comfort zone and surrendered not once, but six times, to in vitro fertilization (IVF), which involved invasive surgical procedures, my husband stabbing me with injectable hormones, taking medications, daily vaginal ultrasounds and blood draws—a far stretch for a person who’d never even taken an Aspirin. Needless to say, IVF was physically and emotionally (and financially) demanding.

Some studies report that the psychological stress associated with infertility is similar to that of experiencing a life-threatening illness. Indeed, in my practice I’d watched many women who appeared to be →

**"SOMETIMES
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WE'RE OVER."



A mom at last: Mary Wong and her daughter, Zoe.

Find out more about Mary and her work at aliveholistichealth.ca.

on top of the world suddenly have that world come crashing down when they began their battle to conceive. Many became depressed, feeling like they were out of control and on a perpetual emotional rollercoaster ride of hope, excitement and anxiety—and the repeated disappointment of their period arriving. Worse yet, many isolated themselves from friends and family in an effort to avoid talking about such a private issue. I vowed that I wouldn't end up like that. Instead, I tried to remain hopeful, focusing on those who had become pregnant against all odds. Instead of being sad each time I got my period, I reminded myself to be grateful I wasn't going through menopause.

I must confess that before all of this happened to me, I would silently judge a woman who submitted herself to IVF. Why would she put her body through hormone injections? I viewed it as an act of desperation. But when I walked down the same path and opened my eyes and heart to this option, I saw it as an opportunity and a second chance—not a last resort. I likened it to a mother risking her life for her child, except in this case I was a potential mother risking my body for my unborn child—a natural maternal instinct I couldn't deny.

It was of great comfort to me that I had Chinese medicine and acupuncture—which I continued to practice and held in high regard—to fall back on. It helped me manage my stress levels, minimized side effects from the IVF drugs, and increased my ovarian and uterine blood flow. Combining Eastern and Western medicines kept me sane and gave me peace of mind, knowing that my husband and I were doing everything we could to optimize our chances of getting pregnant.

After a six-year journey, I am overjoyed and in love with our baby, Zoe, who came into our lives on January 30th of this year. This miracle would not have been possible had I not surrendered to the unknown, and I'm forever grateful to medical sciences and the team of professionals who worked with us.

I'm telling my story not to cause undue worry, but rather to empower women to be proactive and educated about their own fertility. After all, one in six have fertility issues. The more we're willing to talk about it, the more we're able to diminish the stigma, guilt and shame associated with infertility.

To take charge of your fertility, get tested early and get treated for things that can potentially affect your ability to conceive down the road, such as an unhealthy weight, STDs, endometriosis, blocked fallopian tubes, polycystic ovaries, thyroid disease and diabetes. Be open to different approaches. Every medicine has its own tool kit, so by combining more than one therapy, you ultimately have that many more means to deal with your issues.

No one is less of a woman because of infertility, and each of us deserves the opportunity to become a mother. Hopefully, my experience has made me a better mother, wife and health practitioner. The more we're willing to talk about it, the more people will realize just how prevalent fertility issues are, and that we need support from family, friends and the workplace. My ideal is that, one day, all workplaces will support family-building, whereby we don't feel the need to delay marriage and children for fear of losing our job or the next promotion.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. I say it takes a village to create one. ☺