



# Holistic Nursing for Patients Undergoing Fertility Treatment

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I commend South Jersey Fertility Center (SJFC) for recognizing the importance of emotional, as well as physical, well-being of their patients. They integrate a holistic style to provide a balanced method to the rigors of fertility treatment (See page 1).

As a registered nurse with more than 30 years' experience, I have come to appreciate the many different types of healing. My goal as a holistic nurse is to guide individuals in their journey toward self-healing, by integrating Western and Eastern approaches to health.

## The Mind-Body Connection

The mind-body connection focuses on the brain, mind, and body as they interact with other factors such as emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral cues that directly affect health. Such a method respects and enhances each person's capacity for growth through self-knowledge and self-care, and emphasizes techniques that are grounded in individual empowerment.

Mind-body modalities offer many health benefits. The regular use of these interventions brings the parasympathetic nervous system to the forefront (the "relaxation response") in contrast to the sympathetic nervous system (the "fight or flight" reaction). Activating our parasympathetic nervous system calms the body and slows down the heart rate and breathing. This allows the blood vessels to dilate, thereby decreasing blood pressure and improving blood flow to many parts of the digestive tract, as well as the reproductive system.

There is clear evidence for the direct connection between the function of our mind and our body, which is the basis of many Eastern healing arts that are increasingly being incorporated into Western medicine.

## Holistic Nursing

Holistic nurses view healing as a therapeutic partnership with the people in their care. We realize that if we can keep our foundation strong and stable, people will be able to maintain balance and harmony in everyday life, and fend off life's storms.

During the first session, I introduce relaxation techniques and provide handouts that give clients information they can use to practice at home. The

key is to help people help themselves. Services are tailored to meet the individual's needs, depending on where they are in their cycle, as well as their personal requests. Because I emphasize self-care, my handouts and homework give patients tools they can use for everyday living.

The holistic modalities I offer are based on Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT): shiatsu, acupressure, Reiki, yoga, relaxation techniques, and meditation. These modalities help patients increase clarity, maintain healthy circulation, and bring homeostasis to the body. They also provide a vehicle to increased balance as patients go through the rigorous demands of treatment.

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When we are aware our bodies are out of balance, we are either not eating healthy, are stressed out, or our breathing is shallow. These are all signs that we need to relax. I offer the following services designed to meet the individual's needs.

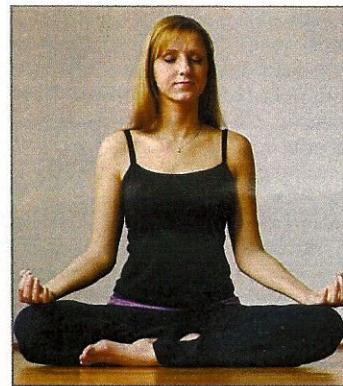
*Asian Bodywork Therapy.* ABT helps to bring vital energy into the body and restores balance by moving and nourishing the free flow of energy or Qi. ABT is based on Chinese medical principles for assessing and evaluating the body's energy system. My expertise is in shiatsu and acupressure.

*Shiatsu* involves applying gentle pressure usually with the thumb and fingers along the energy pathways. Gentle joint rotation and stretching may be included in a session. Releasing the tension blocks in the client affects the mind, as well as the body. The lack of free flow of energy causes discomfort and imbalances. Working with the meridians releases the energy flow through the entire body, not just the specific area of discomfort. The treatment brings a sense of relaxation while stimulating

energy and blood flow.

*Acupressure* uses the fingers to press key points on the surface of the skin to stimulate the body's energy. When these points are pressed, they release muscular tension and promote the circulation of blood and the body's life force, or Qi. The healing touch of acupressure reduces tension, increases circulation, and enables the body to deeply relax. By relieving stress, acupressure strengthens the body and promotes wellness.

*Reiki* is a gentle but powerful technique that addresses chronic and acute conditions. It is a regenerative process of body and mind. I apply a series of hand positions to areas where comfort



and balance are needed, resulting in flowing energy and deep relaxation. It is a tangible form of relaxation that is best understood only by experiencing it.

*Meditation* helps the person find a distinct point of mind-body balances. Through the centuries, meditation has been proved to be a powerful tool to still the mind. Studies have shown that those who meditate are better able to face life with inner strength and balance.

*Yoga* consists of a series of stretching postures (called asanas), breathing exercises, and meditative practices. It increases flexibility, improves muscle tone, and is helpful in the reduction of stress. Yoga can be used as an efficient system to maintain health and balance and revitalize the body systems.

## Collaborating with SJFC

During the past 2 years I have been working with the nurses at SJFC in introducing these much-needed adjunct services to their patients. We began by disseminating information and providing workshops to the nursing staff, and short relaxation sessions

at the center for patients. After reviewing patients' feedback, SJFC began to refer patients to me as a holistic nurse. The key is that the client has to initiate the initial contact with me.

As patients discover increased clarity and thinking, it aids them in following a healthier lifestyle and increases sensitivity about their bodies and body processes. This empowerment may also help them to better communicate their symptoms to their physician and become a more active participant in their own care, as well as have a higher level of self-esteem.

## Self-Care for Nurses

This aspect of self-care is important for everyone, especially nurses, who normally focus on caring for others first. As a registered nurse, I know that self-care is important for all of us; we all need to take time to go into a quiet place, bringing balance and homeostasis to our nervous system and bodies.

The goal is to heal the whole person by recognizing the inner-connectivity of body, mind, spirit, and the environment. This is something that everyone could benefit from, not just those who are going through treatment.

In nursing school we were taught how to take care of our patients, but we were not taught how, to care for ourselves. As caregivers, it is critical to take time each day to promote wholesome behavior and renew and nourish ourselves. Only by being positive role models can we better serve the people we care for. ■

## Holistic Resources

### American Holistic Nurses Association

AHNA ([www.ahna.org](http://www.ahna.org)) promotes the education of nurses, other healthcare professionals, and the public on holistic care and healing, serving as a bridge between conventional medicine and complementary/alternative healing practices. Holistic nursing is recognized by the American Nurses Association as an official nursing subspecialty with standards of practice.

The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine ([www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org)).

Reiki (<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/reiki/>).

Yoga Alliance ([www.yogaalliance.org](http://www.yogaalliance.org)).

Meditation Specialists ([www.meditation-specialists.com/cms](http://www.meditation-specialists.com/cms)).