

**PREGNANCY AND POST-PARTUM
IN CHINESE MEDICINE**

妊娠于产后病

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Giovanni Maciocia
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PHYSIOLOGY

CONCEPTION

Conception relies on an abundant supply of Blood and Essence, the flourishing of Kidneys and Liver, and healthy Chong and Ren Mai, factors which depend on the mother; other factors depend on the father.



Thus both the Pre-Natal Qi, in the form of Essence, and the Post-Natal Qi, in the form of Blood, are essential for conception to occur. However, Blood and Essence are only the Yin essences of the body and conception depends also on the Yang energies of the Fire of the Gate of Life. This is the formless Minister Fire which is intrinsically and indissolubly related to Water. The Minister Fire (related to the Du Mai) provides the spark necessary for the Essence and Blood to form a new being

However, the Essence of the mother is only one aspect of the necessary energies for conception to occur. The mother's Corporeal Soul (*Po*) also plays an important role in conception.



A physical type of soul that pertains to Earth, is Yin in nature, is stored in the Lungs and comes from the mother; it dies with the body at the end of a life. The Corporeal Soul interacts closely with the Essence: it could be said that it brings the Essence into play in all physiological processes.

Spiritual Axis

Chapter 8

"...the Corporeal Soul is the entering and exiting of the Essence."

In particular, the foetus's Corporeal Soul is formed at conception from the mother's: thus the father plays no role in this particular aspect of conception. Thus, from this point of view, the influence of the mother's energies on conception is stronger than that of the father.



This also implies that the hereditary constitution of a baby depends not only on the parents' Kidneys, but also on the mother's Lungs.



KIDNEY-JING

**MINISTER
FIRE**

**POST-NATAL QI
AND BLOOD**

MOTHER'S PO



KIDNEY-JING

**POST-NATAL QI
AND BLOOD**

PREGNANCY



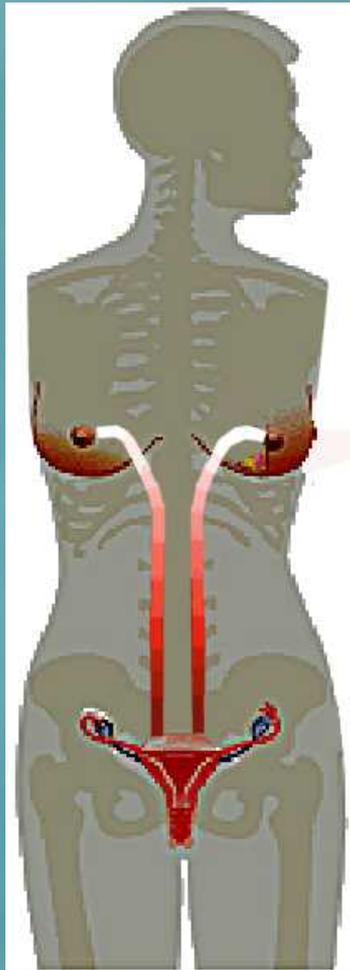
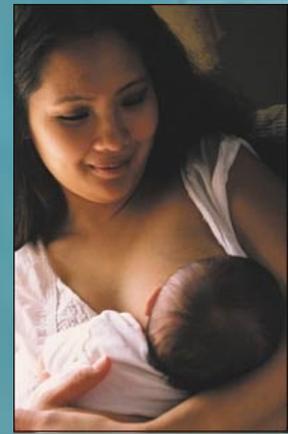
Pregnancy is a time of change. As a result of the stopping of the menses, the Chong and Ren Mai undergo many changes, which are typical of pregnancy and do not occur at other times.

During pregnancy, the periods stop and the 4 phases no longer occur; therefore there is no longer the ebb and flow of the tide of Yin and of Yang.

During pregnancy there is an abundance of Yin, because there is no longer a monthly loss of blood and because there is a gradual increase in fluids (amniotic fluid), and a plethora of Yang, because the absence of periods leads also to an accumulation of Minister Fire (as the Water and the Fire within the Kidneys are inseparable).

PREGNANCY

After conception, Blood is gradually transformed into milk and also transfers its location from the Lower to the Upper Burner.



During the first three months, because of the profound changes taking place in the Chong Mai and because of the transformation of Blood into milk with its upward movement to the breasts, rebellious Qi often goes up in the Chong Mai.

This causes not only morning sickness in the first three months but also a general feeling of heat above and distension of the breasts.

From an energetic point of view, pregnancy has a dual effect on the Kidneys. On the one hand, it poses a strain on the Kidneys as their Qi and Essence go to feed the foetus. However, the stoppage of the menses also means that menstrual Blood (which is not actually "Blood", but *Tian Gui*, a precious fluid) can now go to feed the body itself (as well as the foetus).

It could be said that during pregnancy, Blood is transformed into Essence which nourishes the body (and the foetus).

In fact, under normal circumstances and a healthy pregnancy, a pregnant woman looks very florid and healthy and not Blood-deficient (especially between the 4th and 7th months).





KIDNEY-JING



Periods



KIDNEY-JING

Nourishes



Replenishes



The transformation of Blood into Essence during pregnancy is mirrored, from a Western point of view, by the **secretion of large amounts of oestrogen, progesterone and chorionic gonadotropin by the placenta**, which explains why some women are healthier in pregnancy and others deteriorate; the difference depends both on the pre-existing state of Kidney-Qi and on how well the woman looks after herself during the pregnancy. Two examples of health problems that often improve during pregnancy are asthma and migraine. The increased pigmentation along the midline of the body and round the nipples is due to changes occurring in the Ren Mai.



Another change taking place during pregnancy is a certain increase in Heat.

The Qing dynasty gynaecologist Chen Jia Yuan explains:

"During pregnancy the Emperor and Minister Fire gradually nourish the foetus and there is normally a feeling of heat and a certain restlessness [in the mother]. The Heart governs Blood, [during pregnancy] Blood protects the foetus and cannot irrigate the Sea of Blood."

This passage confirms that Blood deficiency can cause hot flushes and a feeling of heat in a similar way to Yin deficiency. It also states that during pregnancy, although the Blood is abundant (as the menses stop), it is directed to nourish and protect the foetus rather than flowing into the Sea of Blood.



This may explain the fact that, from a Western point of view, although during pregnancy there is a substantial increase in the volume of fluids, including those in the plasma (to a total of about 3300 ml), a 30% increase in the volume of blood and an increase in the total absolute number of red blood cells (by about 20%), there is a decrease in the haemoglobin content because the haemoglobin concentration and the red blood cells count falls in relation to the large increase in blood volume.

Seen from a Chinese perspective, these physiological changes of pregnancy are mirrored in the idea that the Blood increases (because the menses stop) but it is deviated away from the Sea of Blood to nourish and protect the foetus. Hence, whilst from a Western point of view the mother may be said to suffer from anaemia (due to the fall in red cell count and haemoglobin in relation to the increased volume of blood), she cannot be said to suffer from Blood deficiency in a Chinese sense.

Interestingly, a study conducted on 153,602 pregnant women by three English medical colleges showed that women with low haemoglobin levels were *more* likely to carry the pregnancy to full term and give birth to healthy babies. In fact, risks of a pre-term baby or one born with a low birth weight increased seven times in women whose haemoglobin levels failed to *fall* during pregnancy. In other words, the widely seen drop in iron blood levels in pregnant women is perfectly normal, signifying good expansion in blood volume, not anaemia. This confirms what was said above, i.e. that the haemoglobin level of pregnant women is lower only *in relation* to the increased blood and fluids volume.