

Features

## **FOCUS ON HEALTH: Infertility stress program to begin**

The Mind Body Institute for Infertility is accepting participants for a session starting Jan. 20 in its Newport Beach location.

By Jessie Brunner



Debra Sussman, back middle, executive director of the Mind Body Institute for Infertility, stands with Sumiko, back left, and Kim, who succeeded in building their families. Front, Sumiko's daughter Mia, Debra's daughter Sara, and Kim's son Luca, all age 5, at the Mind Body Institute for Infertility in Newport Beach.

A program designed to alleviate the mental and physical stress often experienced by women dealing with infertility comes to Newport Beach this month.

The Mind Body Institute for Infertility is expanding from the Los Angeles community to Orange County, and is accepting new participants for its 10-week program, beginning Jan. 20.

Modeled after the work of Dr. Herbert Benson and Alice Domar in mind/body medicine at Harvard Medical School, the program incorporates relaxation techniques and positive psychology to offer women coping with infertility a way to deal with the associated stresses.

"This program helps women take control over their health," said Debra Sussman, executive director of the Mind Body Institute. "They can manage the unpredictability and stress of infertility with the tools and skills they learn here."

Mind/body medicine integrates medical, psychological and physiological research with the goal of producing emotional and physical benefits for its patients. The institute's program uses several techniques — including yoga, peer support and guided visualization — with this objective in mind.

Newport Beach resident Erin Dickerson completed the Los Angeles-based program in December and is preparing to serve as a peer counselor at the new location.

The 34-year-old said she is more able to handle everyday stresses after completing the Mind Body Institute program, which she referred to as "part support group, part stress class, part yoga and part meditation."

"The program gives you something to lean on when you are so stressed facing medical questions and tests," she said. "It teaches you to restructure your thoughts into a positive way of thinking."

A woman, who preferred to remain anonymous, will be driving from the Inland Empire for the Saturday sessions in Newport Beach. After several failed insemination and fertilization attempts, her doctor recommended her to the program, and she is hoping to find a way of dealing with the "added stress" connected with infertility.

"You don't realize until you are in the middle of it that you can be overwhelmed by the smallest thing," she said. "Having this group is something I look forward to because now I'm not going to be alone."

Dr. Paul Zarutskie of the Laguna Niguel-based Zarutskie Fertility & Endocrine Institute often recommends his patients to the doctor-endorsed program, designed to complement medical treatment for infertility.

Because infertility is a medical and psychological process, he said the mental and physical training available to Mind Body Institute participants guarantees a more comprehensive treatment.

"Good mental health helps provide a balance to patients struggling with infertility and coping with day-to-day stresses," Zarutskie said.

At a cost of \$1,595, registration for the first session of the program is open through Jan. 27. The institute is in the West Tower at 5000 Birch St., Suite 3000, Newport Beach. For reservations, call (949) 412-2466 or visit MBI on the web at [www.mindbodyinfertility.com](http://www.mindbodyinfertility.com).