

7 ways to support your Fertility



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Eating well and taking care of your body is important for everybody, but it really is essential when you're preparing your body for a baby. When you get healthy by changing the way you eat, your body gets healthier, creating healthier eggs, healthier sperm and an altogether better environment in which to start growing another human being.

Whether you've just started thinking about having a baby or you've been trying to conceive for a while, it's never too late to overhaul your diet and lifestyle – and today is the best time to start.

In this guide I'll be sharing with you some of my top tips – all of which are equally valid for men as well as women - so you can stop leaving your fertility plans in the lap of the gods.





1 Eat to balance your hormones

It's tempting to think that you can eat a handful of specific foods and these will work like magic. If only life were that simple. While some foods are reputed to boost fertility, I'm sorry to tell you that eating a pomegranate a day isn't the answer to what you want most. Instead, you must look at your diet in a strategic way before you can get to work on the tactics.

Let's start by talking about the best way to naturally rebalance your hormones. What you eat has a huge impact on your body's ability to create and eliminate hormones. Too much sugar and a diet based on starchy carbohydrates like bread, pasta and rice can zap your energy and have blood sugar levels soaring, then crashing – hardly helpful when you want to get pregnant.

The fix? Stick to a diet based around organic meat and fish, fruit and vegetables, and nuts and seeds.

'Eat real food' is not a glamorous headline, so don't expect to see that splashed all over the newspapers, but it is the single most important piece of advice I can give you. Helping my clients make changes to how they eat *most* of the time is where I always start in my consultations.



Chemicals sprayed on your fruit and veg as it grows can wreak havoc in your body. For starters, this is because the liver has to detoxify yet more chemicals from your system but also because these chemicals are synthetic oestrogens. Given your fertility depends – in part at least – on the delicate balance of your hormones, this is not a recipe for success.

It may be that you already have too much oestrogen circulating in your body. Perhaps you have been diagnosed with a condition linked to oestrogen dominance, like endometriosis and fibroids, in which case adding more is like pouring fuel on the fire.



3 Cut down on caffeine

The caffeine in tea, coffee and energy drinks strips your body of vital fertility nutrients. It can also make it less likely you'll conceive.

Studies show that drinking more than 2 cups of coffee or 4 cups of tea a day can cut fertility by up to 25%. Instead, try switching to herbal teas or a caffeine-free alternative to your usual cuppa.

4 Watch what you drink

Alcohol negatively affects fertility in both men and women. The healthiest option is not to drink if you're trying for a baby. That can be a pretty tall order, especially as there's no knowing when you will see the BFP, so try to limit your drinking to 2 units of alcohol no more than twice a week.

That should keep friends and family from suspecting anything – no one needs the added stress of an audience while you're doing this work!



5 Nourish your body with functional foods

Once you have mastered eating well most of the time, you're ready to add the detail. 'Functional foods' are foods that have special powers beyond being part of a healthy diet. I'm going to list my top five.

Pumpkin seeds

These are the perfect man-snack. They can give lazy swimmers a real boost. They're full of zinc – an essential mineral in male fertility - and deficiency in women can lead to an imbalance of oestrogen and progesterone as well as miscarriage. Both partners should try to have a small handful a day as a snack, or in breakfast cereal, soups or salads.

Asparagus

This is one of nature's best sources of folate, the naturally occurring form of folic acid. You might have heard about how folic acid is important for neural tube development in babies, but it can also help you get pregnant. Research shows women with higher levels of folic acid had a significantly lower risk of ovulatory failure (one of the main causes of infertility). A few servings a week should do the trick. Folate is also found in leafy greens like cabbage, kale, spring greens and spinach, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, chickpeas and kidney beans.



5 Nourish your body with functional foods

Fruit and vegetables

These are helpful for every aspect of health for an assortment of reasons. For fertility, one of the key things to know is they are choc-full of antioxidants, which can help neutralise free radicals that cause DNA damage to eggs and sperm.

Oily fish

Oily fish (that's salmon, trout, herring, mackerel, sardines, fresh tuna, etc.) is another big win when it comes to fertility. They contain omega 3 fats, which the body needs but can't make itself. These fats are the building blocks of all hormones and, if your body doesn't have enough of them, your fertility could be compromised. What's more, omega 3s fats are anti-inflammatory (inflammation can over-stimulate the immune response) and can reduce blood clotting, both of which can help prevent miscarriage. Aim for 3 servings a week.

Pomegranates

These have been eaten for centuries to boost fertility. Scientists now know that's because drinking the juice increases the flow of blood to the uterus and, in men, it improves the quality and motility of sperm. 1 fresh pomegranate or 230ml juice each day is good.





6 Watch your weight

One of the biggest barriers to getting pregnant is being the wrong weight. If you're underweight or overweight, this can seriously reduce the likelihood of getting pregnant because it affects the balance of hormones in your body. Stats show that women who are overweight will take much longer to get pregnant.

Overweight women are also twice as likely to suffer a miscarriage, while the risk of pre-eclampsia doubles and that of developing gestational diabetes is three times higher in overweight women than women with a normal BMI of between 18-25. Check your BMI with this NHS BMI calculator <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx>



7 Take time to relax

Stress can be catastrophic if you're trying to conceive but trying to conceive, in itself, can be very stressful, so working on how you relax is worth its weight in gold.

Exercise regularly as the endorphins can help lower stress levels; try some deep breathing or simple mindfulness or meditation techniques (there are some great free apps out there) for 10 minutes a day, and consider hypnotherapy to reduce stress if you think stress might be a problem for you.

Whatever you do, don't try to 'manage' your stress with unhealthy behaviours like drinking, smoking, taking drugs or comfort snacking on chocolate. I see so many women trying to conceive who are fixated on their nutrition or exercise regime, given these are two ways you can take control over the 'fertility process'. What has been shown from clinical studies is that both health in general and fertility is improved when people (both women and men), look to the rest of their life as well and to see where improvements can be made – like their self-care, mindfulness, gratitude, and so on.

When I'm working with clients, we always talk self-care, which means properly looking after your own happiness and, as a consequence, significantly reducing your stress levels. This means doing a few small things each day just for the joy of doing them. That also includes doing nothing at all and just 'being'. This is called 'white space', and it's often missing in most people's lives as often we're too focused on being productive and achieving things.

It takes time

I know that, when you want to get pregnant, you're hoping for an almost immediate result. From the point of view of a nutritionist, the ideal scenario is that you make changes to your diet and lifestyle three months before you start trying for a baby. That's because three months is the life cycle (approximately) of the egg and sperm, so changes you make today will be for the benefit of eggs and sperm still to be released.

There is a lot of confusing information out there about what to eat or not eat to fall pregnant. Even then, knowing what to do isn't always enough. You'll never regret eating well and taking good care of your body, whatever the outcome. I'd love to help you on that journey. I warmly invite you to book a free mini consultation to discover how you can get started today to prepare your body for pregnancy.

