

GENERAL DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN WHO ARE TRYING TO GET PREGNANT

1) Balance your blood sugar levels

Balancing your blood sugar is one of the most important things for helping with energy levels, improving hormonal balance and creating general health and well being.

The brain needs a constant supply of fuel (glucose) which is provided by the foods we eat. If too much concentrated sugar and high carbohydrate foods such as white sugar, biscuits, cakes, sugary drinks, caffeine, alcohol or even too much fruit, cereal, bread, past, rice or potatoes is eaten at a meal, too much sugar is released into the blood stream at once. From this we get a burst of energy that can be quickly followed by a drop in energy.

The most effective way to correct this cycle is by providing the right balance of foods that give the body a gradual supply of the right fuel throughout the day.

Thus some principles to follow include:-

- Try and eat within 1 hour of rising in the morning
- Having some protein with each meal and snack
- Eat every 3-5 hours
- Do not skip meals
- Replace refined and starchy high glycaemic carbohydrates with complex low glycaemic, slow burning carbohydrates
- Minimise sugar, refined carbohydrates, dried fruit, fruit juice, caffeine, alcohol and over-eating of fruit

2) Eat more alkaline than acidic foods

Many contemporary sources advocate eating alkaline food like vegetables, sprouts, cereal grasses (wheatgrass, barley grass), non-citrus fruits and herbs like black cohosh and valerian root to help provide the entire reproductive system with the right pH for conception and implantation. Acidic foods (like meat, dairy products, and most grains) produce acidic environments. Acidic cervical mucus may become hostile to sperm, which requires an alkaline environment to survive. Since saliva can have an alkalizing effect, it is also recommended that you chew your food thoroughly and refrain from drinking liquids with your meal. Let your own salivary enzymes digest the food rather than washing it down with fluids.

Make sure that the bulk of your diet comes from organic plant sources. Bioflavonoids, found in many fruits and vegetables also help in the formation of healthy blood vessels, helping the uterus to prepare for implantation and prevent miscarriage.

3) Get plenty of essential fatty acids, preferably from unprocessed plant sources and deep-sea fish.

Linoleic acid and alpha-linolenic acid are key fatty acids and essential to every living cell in the body. They are also key in ovulation, specifically in the process of follicular rupture (releasing the egg) and collapse (allowing the development of the corpus luteum – which is the empty egg sac that produces hormones essential for the 'luteal' phase of the menstrual cycle)

Good sources of essential fatty acids are:-

Fish and fish oil

Non-hydrogenated cold-pressed oils such as flaxseed and pumpkin-seed oils

Eggs

Soy products

Raw nuts and seeds

Dark green and winter vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, beetroots, carrots, kale, cabbage, turnips, brussel sprouts

Be aware that long term exposure to heat and light might turn essential fatty acids found in vegetable oils into trans fatty acids which are toxic (other sources of trans fatty acids are lard, animal fat, shortening and margarine and many processed foods). You need to do your best to keep away from this type of fat and also store your oil in a cool, dry place and once its open, use the oil within a couple of months.

Omega-3 is another key fatty acid found in deep-sea fish oil. Omega 3 fatty acids have been found to clean the blood of fat deposits, reduce clotting, and encourage blood flow to the tissues, including the uterus. Omega 3 fatty acids also boost the immune system and have been found to reduce certain immune cells (NK – natural killer cells) which prevent the embryo's implantation in the uterus. The omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docoheaxaenoic acid (DHA) are also essential for fetal brain development.

NOTE: Be aware that elevated levels of mercury can be found in many deep-sea fish. Some companies do ensure purity standards for their fish, guaranteeing low or no toxic metals.

4) Eat organic foods and hormone-free meats whenever possible

In this context, organic means food which has been grown or raised without exposure to artificial fertilisers, pesticides, antibiotics or hormones. Organic foods are understood as necessary for optimum hormonal functioning because many of the pesticides, chemicals, and hormones used to treat produce and animal products contain synthetic estrogen like substances, which have a negative effect on our organ and endocrine system (responsible for hormones in the body)

Chinese medicine provides an additional reason for choosing organic food: food loses its Essence and qi (energy) as it moves away from its source. We all have experienced the truth of this: we know fruit off a tree tastes much fresher than fruit from a grocery bag, and vine-ripened tomatoes taste much better than those ripened on the counter.

The processing most food undergoes eliminates much of the natural nutrition present in the original fruits, grains and vegetables. When we eat refined pasta and white bread, we are consuming mostly processed leftovers, little of the original substance of the wheat is left. Processed fruit juices consist of mostly sugar, and sugar damages the Spleen, which control digestion. Frozen meals are packed with sodium, which depletes the Kidneys. Most of the canned, prepared foods that form the basis of the typical English diet contain preservatives and minuscule original food value.

Overall improvements to dietary health can be made by consuming more of a macrobiotic diet, including mostly fresh, organic produce supplemented with small amounts of hormone-free meat and animal products. The typical Asian diet is macrobiotic – meals consist mostly of fresh, lightly sautéed vegetables, rice and a small amount of meat for flavouring.

You might also want to consider how you prepare your foods. Traditional Chinese cuisine advocates chopping vegetables and meat to allow for the release of more energy when they are eaten, and lightly cooking vegetables rather than eating them raw to make them more easily digestible. It is also good to stay away from the microwave. Microwaving food affects its structure and, according to some sources, decreases the Qi energy available in the food. Cooking on top of the stove or in the oven is preferable.

5) Add more cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, brussel sprouts and cauliflower to your diet.

These foods contain di-indolymethane (DIM), a compound that stimulates more efficient use of estrogen by increasing the metabolism of estradiol (one form of estrogen produced by the body). Excess estradiol is associated with breast pain, weight gain, breast and uterine cancer, moodiness and low libido. Adding DIM sources to your diet allows the estradiol break down into the beneficial 2-hydroxy estrogens, which don't have estradiol's negative effects.

6) Supplement your diet with natural, high-potency multivitamin and mineral complex with iron, folic acid and B vitamins.

The vitamins and minerals important for reproductive health (Vit A, C, E, B complex, zinc and selenium) enhance fertility yet are lacking in the usual Western high processed diet. If these nutrients were adequately supplied through the diet, many fertility problems could be avoided. Other supplements you might wish to try and include are the following:-

- Folic Acid – is extremely important and should be taken as soon as possible. Even months before you conceive and throughout pregnancy. The lack of folic acid can impair the early development of the nervous system of the foetus, causing neural tube defects such as spina bifida.
- Bee pollen and / or royal jelly is regenerative and tonifying
- Blue-green algae i.e. chlorella and spirulina nourish the endocrine, nervous and immune system, regulate metabolism and repair tissue
- Wheatgrass is tonifying and curative enhancing immunity, and restoring hormonal functioning. Other grasses like barley grass function in the same way
- Vitamin B6 helps the body's hormones
- Co-enzyme Q-10 assists the mitochondrial function i.e. the powerhouse of each cell

Buy good quality vitamins from your local health store, Solgar, Lamberts and Biocare are recommended. Also you can order directly online at:

<http://www.foresight-preconception.org.uk/maingifs/vitorderform.pdf>

7) Eliminate caffeine, nicotine and alcohol

Caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants should be avoided. Nicotine ages the ovaries and makes the eggs resistant to fertilisation. Alcohol is particularly damaging and can affect the chances of pregnancy.

Tea, especially green tea, is not as problematic as coffee. It contains about 20% less caffeine, and fewer volatile oils. Coffee constricts the vessels while tea opens them. Green tea (and to a lesser extent, black tea) has an antioxidant benefit coffee does not share. If you require assistance 'revving up' in the morning, use green tea.

For more information on the issues with these substances go to:-

http://www.foresight-preconception.org.uk/books_literaturesummaries.htm

8) If at all possible, avoid unnecessary medications and drugs, including over-the-counter preparations

Even non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen can block the synthesis of prostaglandins and therefore inhibit ovulation.

If you have scanty cervical mucus around ovulation you should avoid decongestants, antihistamines and excess supplemental vitamin C. You may, however, use guaifenesin, an expectorant that thins all mucus secretions, including cervical fluid that is too thick. (While guaifenesin can be found in over the counter cough medicines, natural sources such as beech wood, which you can buy at the health-food store is recommended). Avoid vaginal lubricants, if essential then use egg white.

9) Avoid junk food, excessive stress, too little sleep, too much exercise or anything taxing on the immune system

In general, you should give your body every chance to be at its strongest and healthiest so that it can nourish your child. Late hours, bad food, or excessive stress of any kind means your body has to dedicate its precious resources to keep you healthy rather than making a baby. Live healthfully until you conceive and carry your child to term.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR MEN

Men who are having fertility problems should make similar dietary adjustments. Avoid environmental estrogens and dietary sources of free radicals including saturated fats, hydrogenated oils, and trans fatty acids.

Stop or reduce all unnecessary medications. Increase consumption of legumes and soy (which is high in phytoestrogens and phytoosterols), and include Vit C, E and B12, beta-carotene, folic acid and zinc. Also herbs such as ginseng, which increases production of testosterone and helps with sperm production. Supplement with amino acids L-arginine and L-carnitine which are especially associated with enhancing sperm production. This regimen will improve not only sperm but overall health.

Environmental factors affecting Sperm Quality.

- Occupational heat exposure
- Sauna, hot baths
- Tight underwear
- Fever
- Toxic products: lead, cadmium
- Drugs: heroin, methadone, cocaine etc
- Alcohol
- Cigarette smoking

EXAMPLE MEAL PLAN – talk to your practitioner about foods specifically suitable for you.

BREAKFAST – Eat within one hour of waking. Do not skip

It is essential to have a form of protein with breakfast

Options:-

- 1) Porridge with nuts and seeds made with water, milk, soy or nut milk.
- 2) Twice a week 1-2 eggs with 1-2 thin slices of toast (rye if possible) or crisp bread or beans, grilled tomatoes
- 3) Almond butter, avocado or oily fish on a thin slice of toast (rye if possible)
- 4) Left overs from the dinner before if desired!

MIDMORNING:

Options:-

- 1) Whole grain snack i.e. ryvita, oatcakes with a little hummous or avocado or almond butter.
- 2) Fruit and a few almonds or seeds
- 3) Small bowl of bean / veg soup

LUNCH

Always include vegetables and protein. Soup or cooked vegetables.

Good homemade chicken soup has been long known for its warm nourishing and healing qualities.

Include a protein source (if not eating chicken soup):-

- 1) Cottage, goat or sheep cheese
- 2) Nuts – almonds, walnuts, hazels, sunflower or pumpkin seeds
- 3) Tofu, tempeh, fish (esp oily fish), fowl or lean white meat, occasionally small amount of red meat
- 4) Beans, pulses, lentils, sprouted beans, nuts and seeds

Include a whole grain if desired in small amounts:

Rice, millet, buckwheat, rye, quinoa, wholewheat, spelt, oats, a thin slice of bread, crispbread.

MID AFTERNOON SNACK – See midmorning

EVENING MEAL

Always include vegetables

A selection from the following cooked vegetables: green beans, onions, spinach, brussel sprouts, kale, courgettes, artichokes, cabbage, broccoli, okra, green leafy vegetables, cauliflower, mange tout, leeks,

Protein

Soy in any form (tofu, tempeh, miso etc), fish, fowl, lean white meat, pulses, beans, nuts, seeds, occasional red meat, duck or pork

Starches in moderation

Whole grains: rice, buckwheat, oats quinoa, millet, barley, spelt, a few new potatoes with skin, or a small jacket potato or a serving of root vegetables, peas, sweetcorn or carrots, parsnip, sweet potato, small portion of pasta (wholegrain)

EVENING SNACK – plain yoghurt, fresh fruit, seeds

Sources:

The infertility cure – Randine Lewis

East Meets West in Reproductive Medicine – Mike Berkley L.Ac. New York (Presentation)

Treatment of Infertility with Chinese Medicine – Jane Lyttleton

The Importance of Naturpathic Nutrition in Pre-Conceptual Care – Sharyn Singer (Presentation)

<http://www.foresight-preconception.org.uk>