

ARE YOU TRYING FOR A BABY?

If you are one of the 15% of couples suffering from infertility, then read on to find out how to boost your chances of conception naturally...

Fertility usually peaks within a tight window of 24-48 hours a month only. For most couples, conception is just a matter of timing. For others, however, the causes are more complicated. And when all else fails, and ordinary medicine ceases to have the answers, they turn to alternative therapies.

Very often, we tend to overlook the obvious. If you suffer from the devastating effects of infertility, then remember to get back to basics and allow your body to be as close to nature as possible. Simple alterations to your diet and lifestyle can significantly increase your chances of conception.

Recognising fertile days

- Ovulation usually occurs on day 14 in a normal 28-day cycle (day 1 being the first day of a period)
- Fertile days are also characterised by vaginal mucus, which changes from hostile acidic mucus to more alkaline with a different. This mucus resembles 'egg white', which is clear and very stretchy.
- The position of the cervix also changes 6 days before ovulation. As ovulation approaches, the rising oestrogen levels cause the cervix to rise higher in the vagina and may be difficult to reach with the fingertips.
- DIY kits at the chemist can identify the rise of a certain hormone, called Leutenising Hormone (LH), via a morning urine test. When the levels of LH surge, it is likely that ovulation will take place in the next 24-36 hours.
- The woman's temperature will rise at least 0.2 degrees Celsius as progesterone rises, just after ovulation. Chances of conception are greatest two days before the temperature rise. This method is more useful for contraception.

Making changes

Ideally, any changes to diet or lifestyle should be done at least three months prior to attempting conception.

You can start by making minor changes such as having frequent meals throughout the day. Try to include some protein with every meal, especially at breakfast. Protein is essential for growth and it is involved in many aspects of reproduction. Protein options include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds, and dairy or soya products.

Try to improve your chances of conception and having a healthy pregnancy and baby by incorporating some of the following lifestyle suggestions and including some essential nutrients in your diet.

- **Alcohol** contributes to infertility by depressing sperm production, motility and count. Also reduces body's absorption of Zn and B6, which are key to production of male and female sex hormones. Alcohol is also connected with miscarriages is know to increase

the body's absorption of toxic metals. It is best avoided, especially prior to conception and during pregnancy.

- **Caffeine** reduces the monthly chance of becoming pregnant by 50% from drinking as little as one cup of coffee daily. If you are a caffeine drinker, try to gradually decrease your caffeine intake and replace it with herbal teas.
- **Toxic Metals** (such as Lead, Cadmium, Aluminium, and Mercury) are connected with malformed and low sperm, miscarriages, and infertility. They compete with Zinc and Calcium in the body, both of which are important fertility minerals. Mercury is also highly toxic during pregnancy and can cause defects in the embryo. Mercury is found abundantly in dental fillings, which are best avoided especially prior to conception, during pregnancy, or during lactation.
- **Smoking** increases Cadmium and Lead levels, and decreases Zinc, Selenium, and vitamin C. It is linked with decreased sperm density, count, and motility. In females, it can lead to impaired egg production, lack of ovulation and early menopause.
- **Environmental substances** such as nitrates, pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers can have damaging effects to genetic material – DNA & RNA. These substances are found in many farmed and preserved meats. It is best to wash fruits and vegetables very well before eating and to buy organic food as much as possible.
- **Stress** can be a cause of infertility just as infertility can cause stress. It is important to learn how to manage stress levels via techniques such as meditation, exercise, music, and prayers.

Essential Nutrients

- **Arginine** is an amino acid that is essential for sperm production.
- **Vitamin A and Beta Carotene** are important for the production of both male and female sex hormones; they can prevent delayed ovulation and ovarian cysts
- **B vitamins** enhance fertility and ovulation, and prevent miscarriage and congenital malformations. They are also essential for the formation of male and female sexual hormones.
- **Folic Acid** is needed for proper DNA and RNA synthesis, and the production of healthy sperm and eggs
- **Vitamins C and E, and Selenium** act as antioxidants, protecting genes and sperm from free radical damage. Low levels of these nutrients have been linked to infertility
- **Zinc** is the most important fertility nutrient. It is needed to maintain the menstrual cycle and healthy testosterone levels. It is also essential for the production of DNA and RNA and proper cell division. It is the most critical trace mineral involved in male and female sexual function and used in every aspect of reproduction.
- **Essential fats** (especially omega 6) are crucial in both male and female reproduction. Low levels of omega 6 fatty acids have been linked with reduced male fertility. Omega 3 fatty acids can also help fertility by addressing some conditions that cause infertility such as Endometriosis in women.

Where to find....

Arginine - vegetable proteins (almonds, cashews, pulses), whole grain bread, beef, chicken

B-Complex vitamins - Wholegrains, beans and lentils, nuts, brown rice, seafood, green leafy vegetables, and brassica/cruciferous vegetables (e.g. cauliflower, broccoli)

Vitamin A and Beta Carotene - Egg yolk, dairy products, red, orange and yellow fruits and

vegetables (e.g. carrots, red peppers, pumpkin, sweet potato, apricots, peach, etc.), oily fish, dark green leafy vegetables (e.g. spinach, kale)

Vitamin C - Citrus fruits, papayas, green and red peppers, parsley, kiwi, grapefruit, broccoli, cauliflower, potatoes, tomatoes

Vitamin E - Wheatgerm, cold pressed vegetable seed and nut oils, avocados, nuts and seeds, and virgin olive oil.

Selenium - garlic, mushrooms, nuts and seeds (especially Brazil nuts), wholegrains, meats and seafood.

Zinc - Brazil nuts, pumpkin seeds, ginger, shellfish

Essential fats - Udo's Oil (combination oil sold in liquid form), linseeds/flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds and their oils; salmon, sardines

Alia Almoayed is a Nutritional Therapist running a busy nutrition consultancy in Bahrain, offering nutrition advice to the whole Middle East community. She writes health articles for various publications, holds lectures and seminars on health and nutrition, runs a weekly live radio health programme, and heads a number of weight loss projects. Alia is the author of *I Want Healthy Kids*, a book on how to raise healthy kids, and *The Dream Body Eating Plan*, a weight loss guide; she is also co-author of *101 Ways To Improve Your Health*. For more information, to book appointments, to get regular email health tips, or to request Alia's special FREE Report entitled: *5 Secrets Your Doctor Won't Tell You About Your Health*, visit www.AliaAlmoayed.com.