



Tips for Enhancing Your Fertility

In our ongoing effort to share trustworthy, accurate information with our community we offer this collection of tips to enhance your fertility.

Available on the internet and elsewhere, there is a vast collection of suggestions on how to optimize conception. Unfortunately, many of the "facts" and advice can be contradictory. These conflicting points often occur because the suggested advice seems rational when looking at individual components of fertility, yet studies to evaluate the effects have not been done or have not been able to show any improvement when following these suggestions. Keeping in mind that most folks trying to conceive have busy and complex lives, our list focuses on the ones we know to be true or believe have real potential based on our experience.

While not every fertility concern can be solved using the following suggestions, these are things everyone can do to increase their chances of fertility and a healthy baby. Unless specified, these suggestions apply to both women and men.

Be in good health.

Maintain a healthy diet and weight and exercise regularly, as general health can have an impact on fertility.

Tips for Women –

A healthy and balanced diet comprised of fresh foods, which are not processed or overcooked, is one of the best things you can do for yourself and future offspring.

For maximum fertility, we recommend that you stay close to your ideal weight. If you are overweight, enroll in a weight loss program. Obesity reduces the ability to conceive and increases the rate of miscarriage. If you are underweight, seek help to gain weight. Being underweight is also not good for fertility or pregnancy outcomes.

Moderate, regular exercise will help control weight and will prepare your body for pregnancy.

Avoid vigorous exercise, such as running more than 10 miles per week or equivalent aerobic exercise, which may result in menstrual irregularities or impaired ovulation, or have other effects on the ability to conceive.

Prepare for pregnancy by taking prenatal vitamins that include 325 mg iron, 400 mcg (micrograms) folic acid and 2100 mg calcium.

Abstain from alcohol during pregnancy and while you are trying to conceive. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, characterized by mental retardation and cranial/facial deformities, has been known to occur in infants where mothers drank moderately or lightly during their pregnancies.

Avoid or minimize caffeine. Some medical studies suggest that caffeine use in the preconception period may interfere with conception or may possibly increase the rate of miscarriage. Other data suggest that consuming 300 mg or less per day may not be a problem.

Avoid artificial sweeteners and consult your physician before using herbal remedies. Because the effect of many of these products is unknown, we suggest they not be used without consulting with your physician.

Tips for Men –

Avoid excessive alcohol. Evidence suggests that men who consume alcohol may have reduced sperm count.

Remember your spirit.

People attempting pregnancy should maintain a healthy mind-body relationship through such activities as yoga, meditation, prayer or other relaxation techniques and mental health practices. Emotional stress can impact reproductive health.

There are many resources available for support. RESOLVE, the American Fertility Association and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine are excellent places to start. Visit www.fpnc.com for a list of urls.

Avoid toxins.

If you smoke, stop now. Smoking affects fertility for both men and women. Although some smokers appear to conceive without difficulty, other people may be very sensitive to the effects of smoking. Smoking affects the cervical mucus and proper functioning of the tubes which can increase the risk of a tubal pregnancy in the female. It also reduces sperm count and motility in the male, which may contribute to infertility. Smoking is also proven to be a powerful vasoconstrictor, which can impair blood flow through the placenta to the fetus. This frequently results in low birth weight infants.

Living and working in a complex urban society may present certain risks of exposure to toxic substances. Research into the reproductive effects of exposure to pesticides, insecticides, radioactive materials and industrial solvents is just now being conducted. We recommend that both partners avoid environmental toxins, as well as paint and aerosol sprays.

It is very unlikely video display terminals (VDT) affect pregnancy in any way.

Toxoplasmosis is a parasite infection transmitted through cat feces. Toxoplasmosis can also be caught by eating raw meat. Extra care should be taken by washing hand utensils and cutting boards after handling raw meat. Women should avoid changing the litter box.

Don't overheat.

Excessive heat to the testicles or increasing the core body temperature of women can potentially impair sperm function or possibly egg quality, so couples attempting pregnancy should only use hot tubs or spas for about 10 minutes at a time at a water temperature less than 102 degrees.

Tips for Men –

In addition to long soaks in hot tubs, long bike rides, car trips or other activities that increase heat in the testicles should be minimized while attempting conception. Some feel this would also include not wearing briefs daily, although there is minimal evidence to support this.

Time it right (and other helpful info).

If the woman's menstrual cycles are 26-30 days in length, have intercourse approximately every two days from around day 10 of the menstrual cycle (day 1 is the first day of the period) through day 18 because sperm should be in the fallopian tubes when ovulation occurs.

Pregnancy rates are not affected by positions used for intercourse, nor are they affected by the position of the uterus (forward, mid-plane or retroverted).

Many lubricants used during intercourse can harm sperm, but a safe one to use that is inexpensive and does not harm sperm is canola oil.

Get help if you're having difficulties.

Age affects the chance of having a baby for both women and men. The chances of having a healthy baby drop markedly for women beginning in their 30s. Although men who are in advanced years may father children, fertility rates drop for men beginning at about age 40.

Tips for Women –

Women who are less than 35 should see a fertility specialist if they have not conceived after 12 months of unprotected intercourse, women from 35 to 40 after 6 months, and women over 40 about 3 to 4 months.

Women who have a history of reproductive problems, such as irregular periods, hormonal problems, pelvic operations or infections, fibroids or endometriosis, should see an infertility specialist if they have not conceived within 3 to 4 months of attempting pregnancy.