

Natural Solutions to Infertility

Over the past twenty years, fertility problems have increased dramatically. At least 25 percent of couples planning a baby will have trouble conceiving, and more and more couples are turning to fertility treatments to help them have a family. On average, young couples can expect to wait an average of three years before conceiving, and, as a result, very few doctors will consider a diagnosis of infertility until after at least a year has passed. With a growing number of women waiting until their careers are established before they try to conceive, conception can be more difficult.

What is the cause?

From a medical point of view, infertility is believed to be caused by the following factors, and in these proportions.

Problem	Percentage of cases
Ovulatory failure (including Polycystic Ovary Syndrome)	20
Tubal damage	15
Endometriosis	5
Male problems	40
Unexplained	30

If the mathematics doesn't add up, it's because many couples experience more than one problem when trying to conceive: for example, you may suffer from endometriosis, but your partner may also have a low sperm count.

Interestingly, the most common cause of infertility is 'unexplained', which means that following thorough investigations, doctors can find no specific or identifiable medical problem at the root. Fertility is multi-factorial – in other words, there are many things that can affect your ability to conceive, and they are not all medical! To find the cause of fertility problems, it is important to look at every aspect of your health, your emotions and your lifestyle.

The natural approach to fertility is and has been enormously successful, largely because fertility is multi-factorial. A study conducted by the University of Surrey showed that couples with a previous history of infertility who made changes in their lifestyle, diet and took nutritional supplements had an 80 percent success rate. Given that the success rate for IVF is around 20 percent, it's worth considering these options.

Your Diet

Although it goes without saying that a healthy diet is crucial to a successful pregnancy and a healthy baby, many people are unaware of the fact that diet can help to correct hormone imbalances that may affect your ability to conceive. Try to include the following:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Complex carbohydrates – wholegrains like brown rice, oats and wholemeal bread
- Organic foods where possible

- Oily foods such as fish, nuts, seeds and oils
- Reduce your intake of saturated fats from dairy products etc.
- Increase your intake of fibre
- Avoid additives, preservatives and chemicals, such as artificial sweeteners
- Avoid sugar, both on its own and hidden in food

As well as eating a healthy diet, it is important to know that certain substances are known to lower fertility. Alcohol will affect both you and your partner. In fact, drinking any alcohol at all can reduce your fertility by half – and the more you drink, the less likely you are to conceive. Research has also shown that drinking alcohol causes a decrease in sperm count, an increase in abnormal sperm and a lower proportion of motile sperm. There is plenty of evidence to show that caffeine, particularly in the form of coffee, decreases fertility. Drinking as little as one cup of coffee a day can halve your chances of conceiving and one study showed that problems with sperm: sperm count, motility and abnormalities, increase with the number of cups of coffee consumed each day. Other lifestyle factors such as smoking need to be considered and this affects the fertility of both men and women.

Food Supplements

There is now a great deal of scientific knowledge about the use of nutritional supplements and their beneficial effects on both male and female fertility. As you will see, these supplements can be very effective in re-balancing your hormones, as well as improving you and your partner's overall health, which are so vital for successful conception.

Supplements are necessary because even the best diet in the world will not contain all the nutrients you need to give you the best chance of conceiving.

Folic Acid

It is now known that folic acid can prevent spina bifida in your baby, and it is essential that you get plenty both before and during pregnancy. And that's not all: folic acid is undoubtedly important, but it is just part of the very important B-complex family of vitamins that are necessary to produce the genetic material s DNA and RNA. Together with vitamin B12, folic acid works to ensure that your baby's genetic codes are intact.

Zinc

Zinc is the most widely studied nutrient in terms of fertility for both men and women. It is an essential component of genetic material and a zinc deficiency can cause chromosome changes in either men or women, leading to reduced fertility and an increased risk of miscarriage. Zinc is found in high concentrations in the sperm and is needed to make the outer layer and tail of the sperm and is, therefore, essential for the health of sperm

Selenium

Selenium is an antioxidant that helps to protect your body from highly reactive chemical fragments called free radicals. For this reason, selenium can prevent chromosome breakage, which is known to be a cause of birth defects and miscarriages. Good levels of selenium are also essential to maximise sperm

formation. Blood selenium levels have been found to be lower in men with low sperm counts.

Essential Fatty Acids

These essential fats found in oily fish, nuts and seeds have a profound effect on every system of the body, including the reproductive system and they are crucial for healthy hormone functioning. For men essential fatty acid supplementation is important because the semen is rich in prostaglandins, which are produced from these fats. Men with poor sperm quality, abnormal sperm, poor motility or low count, can have inadequate of these beneficial prostaglandins.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E is another powerful antioxidant and has been shown to increase fertility when given to both men and women. With men, vitamin E helps to increase fertilisation rate. If you are a woman and over 35 and you have been told that your fertility problems are caused by your age, then you are likely to benefit from taking both vitamins E and C. These antioxidants have been shown to significantly reduce age-related ovulation decline.

Vitamin C

Vitamin C is also an antioxidant, and studies show that vitamin C enhances sperm quality and also seems to stop the sperm from clumping together (agglutination) making them more motile. One study has shown that women taking the drug clomiphene to stimulate ovulation will have a better chance of ovulating if vitamin C is taken alongside the drug.

L-Arginine

This is an amino acid found in many foods and the head of the sperm contains an exceptional amount of this nutrient, which is essential for sperm production. Supplementing with L-arginine can help to increase both the sperm count and quality. Note: People who have herpes attacks (either cold sores or genital herpes) should not supplement arginine because it stimulates the virus.

L-Carnitine

This amino acid is essential for normal functioning of sperm cells. According to research, it appears that the higher the levels of L-Carnitine in the sperm cells, the better the sperm count and motility.

To avoid having to purchase single supplements for all of the above, and to make the process easier, I have formulated two supplements which contain the most important nutrients for fertility. They are called *Fertility Plus for Women* and *Fertility Plus for Men* and are available from your local health food shop.

The evidence from the medical literature is showing that not only may nutrition increase your chances of conceiving but that it could also prevent a miscarriage and help you to have a healthy baby. Both the man and the women should make changes in their diet and lifestyle and add in nutritional supplements. It does require a bit of effort at first but it is important to think ‘what have you got to lose?’ In fact, you have everything to gain. Not only will your health improve but you will also increase your chances of getting pregnant.

This article is extracted from Dr Glenville's book 'Natural Solutions to Infertility' and for more information go to www.marilynglenville.com.