

THE BENEFITS OF PLANNING AHEAD

If you are planning a family there is much you can do to prepare for a happy, healthy pregnancy. Although not always possible, ideally, you need to start preparing at least 90 days before attempting conception.

Optimum nutrition from a balanced diet is absolutely vital for conception, maternal and foetal health. Here are some useful guidelines in order to optimize your nutrition:

- Avoid refined food and carbohydrates and junk food (preferably follow a low GL or Mediterranean diet)
- Avoid additives, preservatives and chemicals
- Increase fruit and vegetable intake (a minimum of five veg, two fruit a day)
- Use organic foods where possible and affordable
- Increase your intake of non-haem iron (found in leafy green veg)
- Consider a pre-conception multi-vitamin (which includes folate) and essential fatty acids. Consult with your nutritionist in order to find a good quality one that is right for your needs.

Good Foods for Women:

- Oily fish, walnuts, walnut oil, avocado to provide **Omega-3 fatty acids**.
- Almonds, apricots, avocado, parsley, pine nuts, sunflower and pumpkin seeds, red meat and offal to provide **Iron**.
- Fish, eggs, lean poultry, vegetables, beans and occasional red meat to provide **protein** (aim for 1g per kg of body weight per day).
- Barley, beans, green leafy veg, lentils, sprouts, yeast, liver to provide **Folate** (vitamin B9).
- Avocado, bananas, brewer's yeast, carrot, chicken, egg yolk, legumes, lentils, mackerel, oatmeal, salmon, sunflower seeds, walnuts to provide **Vitamin B6**.

Good Foods for Men:

- Alfalfa, barley, broccoli, brazil nuts, cashews, crab, celery, eggs, fish, garlic, kidney, liver, mackerel, wholegrain cereals, yeast onions, turnip to provide **Selenium**.
- Beef, brewers' yeast, capsicum, egg yolks, ginger, herrings, liver, lamb, sunflower and pumpkins seeds, sea food, whole grains, yeast and offal to provide **zinc**.

NORMAL FERTILITY

It may seem obvious but the following has to occur for normal reproduction:

- The release of a normal ovum (egg)
- The production of adequate sperm
- The normal transport of the gametes (sperm and egg) to the fallopian tubes (where fertilisation occurs)
- The transport of the embryo to the womb for implantation and further development

If anything goes wrong with any of these steps then the result is infertility.

TIPS TO INCREASE FERTILITY

- Avoid all alcohol; it reduces sperm count in men and can prevent implantation of the fertilised egg in women
- Lose weight if you are overweight. Infertility is more prevalent in obese men and women.
- Do not take any drugs, except those prescribed by your doctor. Inform your doctor if you are planning to have a baby as they will be able to advise you if your medications may inhibit conception or be dangerous to the foetus.
- Do not smoke or vape and avoid being around cigarette smoke.
- Some artificial lubricants can prevent the sperm from reaching the cervix.
- Relax. Stress can affect fertility. Stress management techniques can help you deal with stresses that cannot be avoided.
- Consumption of caffeine may prevent some women from becoming pregnant.
- Conception is more likely if the woman is on the bottom during intercourse.
- Do not keep your mobile phone in your pockets. Minimise electromagnetic pollution by keeping your tablets and phones out of your bedroom at night and turning off your wifi while you sleep.
- Do not microwave food in the plastic container as the chemicals in the plastic are endocrine disrupters and may affect fertility.
- Exercise is encouraged as it manages obesity and insulin resistance. However, compulsive exercise is detrimental for fertility as it induces disorders in ovulation.

Be aware that if you are, or have been, on the Oral Contraceptive Pill or other hormone form of contraception that it may take one to three months (sometimes longer) for the body to resume a normal ovulation cycle.