



For references, just click underlined links

Nutrition and Fertility



The clock is ticking and you are thinking, we really want a baby. But there are so many questions whirling around in your mind. How long will it take to get pregnant? Am I fertile? Is my partner fertile? How can I have the healthiest baby possible? Though there are very individual answers to most of the questions above, diet does play a big part in fertility and the health of a baby in utero.

Diets high in unsaturated fats, whole grains, vegetables, and fish have been associated with [improved fertility](#) in both women and men. In contrast eating high levels of saturated fats, and sugar have been associated with poorer fertility outcomes in both sexes. Studies of men have found that semen quality improves with healthy diets (increased motility and number). When it comes to diet, load up on fruits and vegetables, which contain vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Additionally, women and men with obesity [body mass index (BMI) ≥ 30 kg/m²] have a higher risk of infertility as do women who are underweight (BMI <20 kg/m²). [Diet and BMI](#) influence outcomes during clinical treatment for infertility.

A diet rich in iron that comes from vegetables and supplements may lower the risk of ovulatory infertility, according to results from [The Nurses' Health Study II](#), which followed 18,500 female nurses trying to get pregnant. Ovulatory infertility is only one cause of infertility, and it affects 25 percent of infertile couples. A higher than usual dose of folic acid may be recommended for certain women, depending on the medications they take and other medical conditions they have.

Couples eating more seafood were [pregnant sooner](#) than those rarely eating seafood. Most pregnant women consume far less than the recommended 2 to 3 servings of lower-mercury fish (such as salmon, scallops, and shrimp) per week. At the very least, women who are planning a pregnancy should take a prenatal vitamin a minimum of a month before trying to conceive. But avoid excessive vitamins before conception. Too much vitamin A, for example, can be bad for a developing fetus. Iodine in the amount of 150 micrograms/day supports the development of baby's brain and nervous system. Consider seeing your doctor for a "preconception" visit to review what you can do to optimize your chances of a successful pregnancy. For example, certain

medications are harmful to the developing fetus and should be stopped well before planning a pregnancy. It is important to wean yourself off excessive [caffeine](#), as research has shown that more than 200-300 milligrams of caffeine per day may reduce fertility by 27 percent. Caffeine also hinders the body's ability to absorb iron and calcium. Alcohol should be eliminated completely when trying to conceive to avoid fetal alcohol syndrome.

Published by a team of Harvard researchers, the ["Fertility Diet"](#) study found women with ovulatory infertility who followed this eating plan had a 66 percent lower risk of ovulatory infertility and a 27 percent reduced risk of infertility from other causes than women who didn't follow the diet closely. Begin making [healthy nutrition](#) changes 3 months to a year before you conceive.

[Assisted reproductive technology](#) (ART) is a process that is very hopeful and emotional for couples having difficulty conceiving. It makes sense to move forward with this process in the most optimal nutrition status possible. Promoting healthy dietary patterns and higher folate intake among individuals experiencing infertility may improve their chances of achieving a pregnancy while tempering the psychological burden associated with their experience.

A diet consistent with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans along with adequate vitamin D intake is important for women attempting to get pregnant. [New research](#) has shown optimal vitamin D levels are linked to improved fertility. During pregnancy vitamin D is involved in transferring calcium to the growing baby. It is also important for a wide variety of biochemical processes in [both mother and the developing baby](#).

Antioxidants deactivate the free radicals in your body, which can damage both sperm and [egg cells](#). Substances that produce free radicals include fried foods, alcohol, tobacco smoke, pesticides and air pollutants. Foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains are packed full of beneficial antioxidants like vitamins C and E, folate, beta-carotene and lutein. Zinc and selenium are also protective antioxidants. Studies of infertile men have found that [adequate zinc and selenium](#) can reduce the damage to sperm caused by free radicals and improve sperm quality.

Since science demonstrates nutrient rich diets lead to increased overall health, why not partner with your partner and follow dietary recommendations that may improve fertility while trying to get pregnant? Not only may you become pregnant sooner, chances are your baby in utero will also enjoy better health.

