

Nutrition for Fertility

EAT RIGHT AND CONCEIVE



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The content of this booklet is for information only and is not intended to replace medical advice. If you have any medical concerns then please seek the advice of a qualified medical practitioner.

What Is Fertility Nutrition?

Nutrition for fertility is about replenishing and restoring nutritional balance.

It is about eating **real food** and not "food-like substances".

It doesn't need to be complicated and it isn't rocket science.

We would suggest that if you think that you need to change your diet because you're trying for a baby, then you need to change your diet, full stop.

Fertility is not an isolated aspect of ourselves; it is not a separate entity that can be looked at in isolation for a short period of time.

Just as we are more aware nowadays of how our diet and lifestyle can affect our heart health, we need to be similarly aware of how it can affect our fertility.

So, it's time to start thinking of your body as a whole, all systems working together for balance.

This means your nutrition needs to **optimize** not just your reproductive system, including the health of your sperm and eggs, but also your digestive and immune system; it needs to restore **blood sugar** balance to even out energy peaks and troughs and it needs to balance your **hormones**.



Do I Need to Change My Diet?

Consider what you have eaten over the last week or two. How many of the following list can you tick off?

pizza, pasta, pastries, pies, cakes, biscuits, ice cream, milk chocolate, sweets, crisps, white bread, white rice, sauces from packets or jars, margarine, chocolate cereals, low fat yoghurts etc., take-aways, ready meals fizzy drinks, diet drinks, alcohol, fruit juices, hot chocolate, milk shakes...

Most of the foods on this list are highly processed and contain ingredients that you wouldn't use if you were making them at home (preservatives, flavorings, extra sugar...)

In fact some of these foods are so processed that you couldn't make them in a home kitchen - these are what I referred to earlier as "**food-like substances?**"

The effect that these foods can have on the body is to create an **inflammatory environment** which can have a negative impact on egg and sperm health and on implantation.

Many aspects of the fertility journey seem beyond our control. We can however, **take charge** of our nutrition. Every nutrient has an impact, however small, on the quality of eggs or sperms we produce and hence the quality of embryos.

Whether you are trying to conceive on your own or are following an IVF protocol, then your nutrition is vitally important.

Are you running on caffeine to get through the day? Are you so stressed that your stress hormones are through the roof? Are you training too hard at the gym or running too many miles?



How you eat your food is just as important as what you eat.

AN ACUPUNCTURIST'S PERSPECTIVE

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM) PLACES A MUCH BIGGER EMPHASIS ON DIET AND LIFESTYLE AS CONTRIBUTORS TO OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING.

As Acupuncturists trained in TCM, nutrition is extremely important to us. Most of our patients receive nutritional advice as well as acupuncture, even if the symptom they presented with didn't seem particularly related to diet and nutrition. Thankfully there are many signs of change in Western healthcare as regards diet and lifestyle.

Food can be categorised in TCM according to its warming (**Yang**) or cooling (**Yin**) effect on the body. This definition, however, does not refer to the temperature at which the food is eaten but more to it's **energetic effects** on the body.

Yin and yang are probably, in part, a reflection of the **acid-alkali** properties that we know of today. A bit of chemistry: when we refer to **acidic or alkaline forming foods** we are referring to the digested food and it's effects. This can be different to the pH we might have tested with litmus paper at school.

TCM advises us to **avoid** too much **cold and raw** food. It is far better to make soups, stews and casseroles so that we can be kind' to our digestion and, importantly absorb more nutrients. So, no need to live on salads!

A stressful lifestyle can also conflict with an alkaline diet and reduce some of its benefits because chronic stress causes **inflammation** in our system which can lead to acidosis, sometimes indirectly - we often crave sugar when our stress hormone, **cortisol**, is elevated!



TOP TIP

To start the day correctly: drink a large glass/pint of warm water with lemon juice. Try to have this at least half an hour before you eat or drink anything else. Surprisingly, lemons are an alkaline-forming food.



Habits to aim for..

EAT REAL FOOD NOT FOOD-LIKE SUBSTANCES

- start each day with a large glass of warm water with the juice of half a lemon and 1 tsp grated root ginger.
 - limit **refined carbs** and try rye/spelt bread, quinoa, whole grain rice, gluten free pasta, lentils, whole oats.
 - limit **starchy meals** (bread, potatoes, rice) and also "sweet" vegetables (squash, carrot, sweet potato)
 - include lots of **healthy fats** - olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds.
 - use extra virgin olive oil for dressings etc. but **not** for cooking.
 - buy **organic** produce, especially meat and dairy produce.
 - use wild or organically farmed fish.
 - use **full-fat dairy** produce unless you are intolerant.
 - include lots and lots of **leafy greens** and herbs.
 - do **not** include any reduced fat or diet food/drinks.
 - cut down on **caffeinated** drinks, or eliminate.
 - cut down or eliminate alcohol.
 - include green tea.
 - try not to over consume **juices/smoothies** (too much sugar.)
 - limit fruit to one or two portions per day (sugar again.)
 - avoid too much **cold/raw food**, allow salads to get to room temperature and use room temperature fruit/veg for smoothies.
- 



While it is true that you are born with all the eggs you'll ever have, it is possible to improve the environment in which they develop and mature by following an "egg-friendly" nutrition plan.

Age is, of course, the biggest factor affecting egg quality, with **DNA/chromosome** damage being an inevitable "side effect" of passing years. Cell ageing is often a result of **free radicals**, which are a natural by-product of our metabolism. Free radicals have unpaired electrons (a bit of a science lesson here!) and electrons don't like to be alone; so, these solitary electrons steal another electron from the cells around them and hence damage the cell. This process is called oxidation.

Foods that minimise free-radical damage are therefore ones that contain plenty of **anti-oxidants**. These knights in shining armour are able to provide those electrons to the needy free radicals and hence slow down cell damage.

Alkaline forming foods contain the most anti-oxidants and have the most effect on counteracting inflammation and free-radical damage.

It takes around 150 days for an egg to mature within its follicle. The important message here therefore is that although your nutritional and lifestyle choices may improve the quality of your eggs, **it will take time**.

If you change your diet today, the impact will most likely be on the eggs that will mature in 3-4 months time. Some of the changes may begin to have effect in the next month's cycle, so it's never too soon and it's almost never too late to begin to make improvements to your nutrition.



Nourishing Your Sperm Cells?

Sperm cells are often the forgotten half of the equation! They are manufactured all the time and so are perhaps more influenced by lifestyle and nutrition than egg cells.

Amino acids, fatty acids and anti-oxidants are the three most important nutrients for sperm health: high-protein meat and fish, nuts and seeds and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables are enough to cover all three bases. Follow the nutrition suggestions in this booklet and you can't go wrong.



VITAMIN AND SUPPLEMENTS TO BOOST MEN'S FERTILITY

- Take a daily multivitamin starting at least 3 months before trying to conceive. Try to find one that contains **methylfolate** rather than synthetic folic acid.
- To reduce reduce sperm damage due to oxidation, **CoQ10**/Ubiquinol/Bio-Quinon.
- **Fish Oil**, to provide DHA. Search out a good quality fish oil.
- The best way to ensure that you are taking in the right vitamins and minerals is to include a wide variety of **different coloured** vegetables and fruits in the diet.



Foods to Avoid or Reduce for Egg & Sperm Health...

AVOID AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

- **Trans-fats** (chemically manufactured fats) which damage cell membranes, increase inflammation and disrupt blood sugar balance. Often found in processed, fried and fast food.
- **Alcohol** - eliminate altogether, beginning 3 months before trying to conceive, this applies to both male and female.
- **Fizzy drinks**, including diet drinks, which contain refined sugars or sugar substitutes and sometimes caffeine.
- **Refined carbohydrates**, white bread, pasta, white rice, sugar
- Fish with **high levels of mercury**, such as those at the top of the food chain - swordfish, marlin and to some extent tuna.
- Foods with high levels of **omega-6 fatty acids**, such as margarine, sunflower oil, soybean oil, corn oil, which can aggravate inflammation. While we do need some omega-6 fat, it is important not to affect the ratio of omega-3 and omega-6 fats
- **Low-fat/no-fat/sugar-free** foods often replace these substances with artificial substitutes. Low fat dairy will be low in Vitamin D since it is found in the fat/cream which has been skimmed off.

HAVE IN MODERATION WHERE POSSIBLE

- ham, bacon, processed meat.
- smoked foods.
- red meat (twice a week at most is advised.)
- white and milk chocolate - sorry! Small amounts of dark chocolate (70%+ cocoa) are ok.
- caffeine, a grey area. If you can cut it out completely, or at least cut down to one a day.

Pointers for Success

The main principles:

- **Make sure , if possible and where applicable, that both partners are invested in your new regime.**
- **Manage your expectations: changing your diet doesn't mean you'll be pregnant within a month.**
- **Allow 3 months for any long lasting benefits to happen - it takes this long for egg and sperm cells to mature.**
- **Look at your lifestyle and see if your stress and cortisol levels are too high. This isn't conducive to conceiving.**
- **If you can, include acupuncture in your regime: this can give a boost to your digestive system and has been proven to improve outcomes of both natural and assisted conception.**
- **If you fall off the wagon, dust yourself down, forgive yourself, and just carry on where you left off.**

**Schedule at Appointment
with a fertility specialist
at Integrative Acupuncture at
www.acupunctureinvermont.com**

Thank You...

....for taking the time to read this, I hope it has helped to start you off on the right track in terms of understanding how nutrition can make the most amazing difference to your life.

TCM considers the Mind, Body and Spirit as a whole. No symptom is considered in isolation; we like to get to the root of the problem.

We firmly believe that everything that happens in our body is influenced by how we fuel it. An acupuncturist's approach is to combine the best of their TCM learning with nutritional therapy to enable as many people as possible to create the best version of themselves.

So, what are you waiting for...

....get eating and healing!

*Click here to schedule your
FIRST APPOINTMENT
with a provider
at Integrative Acupuncture*

