

## **Fertility Guidelines**

A Harvard Nurses' Health study followed over 18,000 women in a long-term research project looking at diet and fertility and the effects that diet has on the development of chronic diseases. The study found that women who had the lowest rate of ovulatory problems, or the highest fertility rates were those who ate a plant based, low GI (Glycemic Index) diet focusing more on vegetable protein and monosaturated fats. They also exercised more, took multi-vitamins and ate one serving of high fat dairy daily.

### ***Carbohydrates***

High GI foods were found to increase ovulatory infertility due to the rapid release of glucose into the bloodstream creating an insulin peak associated with high energy followed by a depressive low. Examples of High GI foods are: Refined flours, alcohol, candy, soda's etc.

The opposite effect was found with women eating more slow releasing carbs with a low GI. Not only did this increase fertility but also has been found to strongly decrease chances of gestational diabetes, which is becoming an increasingly common problem for women and their babies. Blood sugars and insulin levels which are primarily dictated by carbohydrate consumption are primary factors in ovulation and therefore essential to fertility. The study revealed that a diet consisting of about 60% of its calories from slow release carbs contribute to more balanced lifestyle, hormonal physiology, and more even weight distribution.

### ***Fats***

Monosaturated fats, which are found in natural foods, contribute to healthy cardiovascular function. Transfats, which are synthetic fats, found in packaged and processed foods as well as in fast foods, contribute to inflammation within the body, decreased immunity and plaque build-up in the arteries. The study found that women who ate trans fats had a major decline in fertility regarding ovulation and conception. When choosing an oil, cold-pressed, virgin and/or unrefined ones are the best.

### ***Proteins***

Moving towards a more plant based protein portion of your diet can increase fertility. In fact women who had more than 115g of protein per day were found to have more ovulatory fertility problems than those consuming 77g per day. The type of protein played a big role in the results. Ovulatory infertility was 39% more likely in those consuming more animal protein than those consuming plant protein. Great sources of plant-based protein are legumes, nuts, seeds and soy.

It is important to put soy in perspective. In Asian culture soy, as well as most other things, are eaten in moderation, as compared to the excessive nature in which soy has been consumed in recent years in North America. As with the trend of this diet it is important to stick to organic non-gmo soy. Be sure to not over eat or eat nuts and seeds as your major source of protein, but rather limit them to about 20 nuts per day. Nuts and seeds are high in good fats but in excess can cause the digestive system to become sluggish. Small amounts of grass or pasture fed meats are acceptable as well as 3-5 eggs per week.

### ***Dairy***

According to the Harvard study women eating low fat dairy have a harder time getting pregnant and those eating full fat had an easier time conceiving, Dairy should be eaten in moderate amounts however as it does have a tendency to create what Chinese Medicine refers to as Phlegm or Dampness. Phlegm/Damp will cause

stagnation and prevent the smooth flow of qi, which is essential to fertility. Ask your practitioner if Dairy is appropriate for your constitution and if it is feel free to enjoy one serving of whole fat raw dairy per day.

### ***Weight***

Too much or too little can hurt you when trying to conceive. Although there is controversy-surrounding BMI, i.e. if someone has high muscle mass they will show a higher BMI even though they are not overweight. But it has been found that a BMI of between 20-24 is considered the fertility zone. You can figure out your BMI by going to the website [www.bmicalculator.org/](http://www.bmicalculator.org/) and entering your information.

### ***Are you Toxic?***

Environmental toxins are common knowledge in this day and age and although our body is equipped with a natural detoxification system, often times it is over toxic due to the numerous places we receive toxins from. Toxins can and will store themselves deeper and deeper into the body the more overloaded our body becomes. For people who don't eat a diet low in toxicity, do live in an urban environment or use household products laden with toxic chemicals and don't detox regularly it is common to find toxins in deep layers of the body referred to as the extra cellular matrix (ECM). The ECM makes up the space between or cells and organs known as the connective tissue. When this layer becomes toxic physiological disruption will occur. Because of this, being too toxic will often cause hormonal disruption. It is important to get a proper detox that will drain toxins from this layer; in my experience homeopathic detoxes such as the Heel detox kit work best. Toxins deep in the body also contribute to the progression of chronic diseases and inflammation, both of which work against fertility. Eating a highly alkaline diet and detoxing can bring down cellular inflammation.

### ***Coffee***

If your intention is to get pregnant then you want to seriously consider cutting coffee out for the time being. Although I do not believe coffee is bad per se and different people are able to metabolize it better, it can lend to adrenal fatigue and kidney depletion (See below for the role of Adrenals and Kidneys in fertility.) The caffeine can stimulate the adrenals to produce adrenalin and often times when we are reaching for our coffee in the morning or throughout the day it's to compensate for a lack of energy. Stimulating your body to come up with energy it does not have at the time is a habit far worse than coffee itself. If you aren't taking enough time to rest during the day or aren't making enough time for sleep at night, that's the root issue that you want to deal with, not coffee. Aside from the caffeine, the oils in coffee beans are very hard for the kidney's to filter. The kidney's will work extra hard to filter the oils which creates what Chinese Medicine refers to as heat, in western terminology this is the equivalent to inflammation or too much acidity in the body. Heat burns up yin and blood, 2 essential markers in fertility.

### ***The Role of Stress and Diet in Fertility***

Its no surprise that stress, which leads to inflammation and a disruption of the smooth flow of qi within the body, wreaks havoc on our reproductive system. When men and women don't take proper time to rest, the demands made on their bodies can be unforgiving. In Chinese medicine when we use beyond what our body is capable making on a daily basis we start stealing from our reserves. The digestive system, also know as the Earth element in TCM, consists of the Spleen and the Stomach. The Spleen and the Stomach are the first and most important steps in the production of qi and blood within the body. Qi is essential for proper physiological functioning and blood is essential for nourishing the entire body. In fact, before they had access to modern medical equipment, the Chinese believed that for a baby to be conceived it required the blood from the mother

and the essence from the father. Although now we have an understanding of how much more complex the whole picture is, this basic principle of nourishing the mothers blood still holds true when focusing on fertility.

When we use qi beyond what our Spleen and Stomach can make from the food and drink we consume, we tap into the reserves stored in the Kidneys. The qi of the Spleen and Stomach can and are replenished on a daily basis - provided the diet is conducive to good health - but the qi of the Kidney's cannot. The Kidneys play an essential role in growth, production of blood and reproduction as well as aging. When we live a life without adequate rest, those people who are constantly on the go, end up running on empty as they deplete their adrenals/Kidney Qi. Traditionally the Chinese didn't have a distinction for the adrenals but were considered part of the kidneys. Since the adrenals are small glands that sit atop the Kidney's it's easy to understand how this correlation was made. The adrenal glands are key in producing androgens which are the precursors to sex hormones. Depleting your kidneys/adrenals depletes their ability to make androgens and keep hormonal balance.

Taking time to rest, breathe and be relaxed is central to good fertility. Some things you can do are to take 10 minutes at least 2 times during the workday to breathe consciously. Stop, close your eyes and breathe long moderately paced belly breaths. This also helps circulate qi. Going for walks outside and breathing in fresh air creates a calm and peaceful effect. And taking the time to eat slowly without any distractions is crucial if you want your digestive system to be able to extract the most from food. Some tips are putting the paper, TV, computer or work down so you can fully focus on eating. Also putting your fork down between each bite allows the body to be relaxed and therefore more able to digest.

### ***Everything in Moderation***

Finding the balance in your life means not being overly dogmatic about anything. All of the above are considered guidelines, the most important thing to remember is to not stress if you eat something not on your good fertility food guide. If you are having problems with overeating, or eating too much junk not conducive to fertility you may want to look deeper into why you are having a troublesome time with food. My experience, clinically and personally is the more balanced people are in their lives the more they want to nurture that balance and eating properly and moderately seems to be a natural response to how they feel.

Be sure not to overeat anything. Overeating taxes the digestive system and the liver. The liver's job is to make sure the qi and blood flow smoothly in the body so we want it to be unencumbered so it can do its job. My teacher used to say *Not too much, Not to Little, Just Right*. You may want to try eating 5-6 smaller well-balanced meals or 2-3 larger meals and 2-3 smaller snacks per day. Find your own balance, you know what works for you but be honest with yourself, ½ a pint of cookie dough ice cream per night may not be nourishing you as much as you are telling yourself. If your lifestyle is about health then indulging in the odd treat will never be a bad thing.

If you have any questions about any of the above or how it fits into your own personal diagnosis please do not hesitate to ask. I am always available and willing to talk about the role Chinese Medicine is playing in your life.

All the best in your fertility journey,

Paula

## Quick GI reference

This list is not exhaustive but includes common foods. If it's overly processed and high in sugar chances are it's on the high GI list and recommended to be avoided.

### **Low GI foods** (55 or less)

Bran  
Oat Bran  
Rolled Oats  
Wholegrain/Pumpernickle bread  
Sprouted grain bread and tortillas  
Sourdough Rye  
Pasta cooked al dente  
Brown Rice  
Quinoa  
Pearl Barley  
Yam  
Frozen Peas  
Frozen Corn  
Carrots  
Broccoli  
Cauliflower  
Cabbage  
Mushrooms  
Tomatoes  
Lettuce  
Green Beans  
Eggplant  
Rep Peppers  
Onions  
Cherries  
Plums  
Grapefruit  
Peaches  
Apples  
Pears  
Strawberries  
Kidney beans  
Chick Peas  
Navy Beans  
Lentils (Green & Red)  
Pinto Beans  
Black-eyed Beans  
Yellow Split Peas

### Whole Milk Yoghurt **Medium GI Foods** (56-69)

Bran Buds  
White Pita  
Beetroot  
Basmati Rice  
Couscous  
Cornmeal  
Taco Shells  
Gnocchi  
Baked Potatoes  
Wild Rice  
Ryvita  
Honey  
Mango  
Sultanas  
Bananas  
Papaya  
Figs  
Pineapple

### **High GI Foods** (70 or more)

White Bread  
Bagel  
Baguette  
Pumpkin  
Parsnip  
Pretzels  
Rice Cakes  
Donuts  
Scones  
Maple Syrup  
Watermelon  
Dates

## **Fats Guide**

Use only Cold Pressed unrefined oils. Anything that is heated over 35 degrees will be damaged and easily becomes toxic.

If you are frying Coconut oil is a good choice as it can tolerate high temperatures and is not easily oxidized.

The following oils are good to use as cold dressings:

- ⇒ Cold Pressed Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- ⇒ Unrefined Sesame Oil
- ⇒ Cold pressed flaxseed or hempseed oil
- ⇒ Unrefined cold-pressed black currant, avocado or hazelnut oil.

Be sure to include 2-3 servings of Omega-3 Fats per day.

- ⇒ Deep-sea short-lived fish such as anchovy, mackerel, salmon and halibut. (Longer living deep sea fish have more time in the water to acquire toxin mercury levels)
- ⇒ Walnuts
- ⇒ Hempseeds, hempseed butter or hemp oil
- ⇒ Olives or cold-pressed olive oil
- ⇒ Flaxseed meal or flaxseed oil
- ⇒ Salba seeds

## **Proteins**

More plant based proteins and less animal proteins.

### *Plant based proteins*

- ⇒ Legumes ie. Lentils, beans, peas
- ⇒ Nuts and seeds
- ⇒ Soy ie. Tempeh, miso, tofu

### *Animal Based Proteins*

- ⇒ Grain or pasture fed red meats
- ⇒ Organic Turkey or Chicken
- ⇒ Free Range eggs

Make animal protein portions the size of your palm, no bigger.

## **Dairy**

If your constitution allows for it you can have one serving of whole fat **raw** dairy per day. One serving includes: ½ Cup Yoghurt, a Glass of whole fat milk or ½ oz of cheese). Do not eat dairy if you have endometriosis, PCOS or dampness – ask your Chinese Medicine practitioner or Acupuncturist if you do.

## **Multi Vitamin**

Be sure to get a good quality Multi-Vitamin as not all vitamins are created equally. It is important to get vitamins that have not been heat processed, as this will cause essential ingredients to be lost. You can check out which vitamins are the best or how your current multi measures up by going to the website [www.multivitaminguide.org/rm/index.html](http://www.multivitaminguide.org/rm/index.html). For more information about a good Pre-Natal ask your practitioner for their recommendation.