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Quick Conception

Top Tips When You're Trying to Conceive

by Kim Seidel

Kate McCarthy of Oakland, Calif., took charge of her fertility in her early 30s. When it was time to try to get pregnant, it took her five cycles for success. She's expecting her first child later this winter in February.

McCarthy boosted her fertility with regular acupuncture treatments. The sessions smoothed out her irregular periods. She also exercised regularly, and made sure she was well rested before trying to conceive.

"Try to take time out – get away from a busy schedule," says McCarthy, who gave her own body a few months to recoup after she became a licensed acupuncturist herself. "I've seen it repeatedly. I know a hard-working lawyer who tried to get pregnant for two years. She decided to take one month off of work and got pregnant then."

From acupuncture to exercise to just plain resting, below are some of the best practices you can do when you're trying to conceive.



Get Physical in 4 Steps

1. Track your cycles. Contrary to popular belief, the optimal time for conception for normal couples is the five days before ovulation, and including the release of the egg, says Dr. Shelley Binkley, an OB/GYN at Alpine Women's Care in Glenwood Springs, Colo. For most women, these are days nine through 14 from the start of their menstrual cycle. Consider the first day of full flow as "Day 1" of your cycle.

"The easiest way to determine your likely day of ovulation is to track your cycles for at least three months. Then, determine the average interval between consecutive first days of your menses, and subtract 14 days," Dr. Binkley says. "This will yield your most likely date of egg release."

For example, if you have 28-day cycles, subtract 14 and your egg should be released on Day 14.

2. Have sex at peak fertility. You may miss the most fertile time of your cycle if you time intercourse to occur just after your day of egg release, Dr. Binkley says. The egg can live in the female reproductive tract for about 36 hours. Sperm, on the other hand, can live there for up to five days.

"If you have intercourse for the five days preceding and on your day of ovulation, you maximize your chances of conceiving because the sperm are physically near the egg as it's being released, just 'hanging out' waiting to fertilize the egg," Dr. Binkley says.

3. Look for fertility signs. Use your body's physical signs of ovulation and pre-ovulation to predict optimal time for conception. Many women with regular cycles produce a clear mucous discharge in the few days preceding and during egg-release, Dr. Binkley says. It's "gooey" and "sticky," which is easy for sperm to penetrate and to sustain them on their way to the egg.

4. Invest in a test. When women rely solely on the calendar to estimate when their ovulation will take place, they're frequently wrong, says Kelly Andrews, founder of Fairhaven Health, a national company offering natural products for fertility and pregnancy health, based in Bellingham, Wash. "There are many predictive tools on the market – at a variety of price points – that can help you, from fertility monitors to saliva ovulation microscopes to drugstore-brand ovulation tests," Andrews says. "Ovulation tests also can be purchased online for around \$1 per test, ideal for avid testers."

Nutrition Top 3



1. Take folic acid. Women attempting pregnancy need to take a multivitamin with folic acid, which is crucial to the normal development of the baby's spine, Dr. Binkley says. Ideally, start taking the recommended amount of folic acid – .4 milligrams (mg) – three months before trying to get pregnant.

2. Eat healthy. Green leafy vegetables, meats and fortified cereals are common dietary sources of folic acid, Dr. Binkley says. During preconception and pregnancy, eat a commonsense diet – well-balanced with lots of fruits and vegetables. Avoid fast foods, snack foods and refined sugars.

3. Try innovative foods. Try foods such as goji berries and kombucha drinks to boost your fertility, says Dawn Clare, an intuitive coach and alternative healer in Santa Monica, Calif. Goji berries are the highest rated

antioxidant food filled with nutritional value, including protein, minerals and amino acids. Kombucha drinks also are filled with vitamins and are a natural detoxifier and health aid to support the fertility process.

Spice up Your Sex Life in 6 Steps

1. Stop "trying." "I have had friends who have struggled with years of infertility, and as soon as they stop 'trying,' they have gotten pregnant," says Beth Vincent, a Baltimore, Md.-based nutrition expert and founder of the Oh Mama! line of nutrition bars and drinks created for women who are pregnant, nursing or trying to conceive.

It's not always that simple, but for some people, the stress of sex for conception makes the act ineffective and something to avoid. It's hard to conceive when you aren't having sex!

2. Have orgasms. Orgasms may increase the likelihood of conception, according to Clare. Of course, an orgasm is absolutely necessary for a man to participate in the conception process, and according to some experts, the contractions of the uterus after orgasm help the sperm along. Regardless, the message is loud and clear: Have fun with your sex life!

3. Make love – often. "Timing intercourse to correspond with your ovulation date is important, but research indicates that couples who make love regularly – at least a few times per week – improve their chances of conceiving sooner," Andrews says.

4. Do it "missionary style." "The missionary position with the man on top is generally regarded as the best sexual position to use when trying to achieve pregnancy," Andrews says. Positions with the woman on top are generally not recommended for women trying to get pregnant, he says.

5. Do it "doggy style." If you have a tipped uterus, the best position is having your partner enter you from behind, doggy style. This may provide sperm with better access to the cervix, Andrews says.

6. Avoid regular lubricants. Regular lubricants have been clinically shown to harm sperm and impede their progress, Andrews says. Instead, use a "sperm-friendly" lubricant that is specifically designed for trying-to-conceive couples, he says.

Lifestyle Top 4

1. Clean up your act. The sooner you want to conceive, the sooner you – and your partner! – should stop indulging in alcohol, cease smoking and limit caffeine, Andrews says.

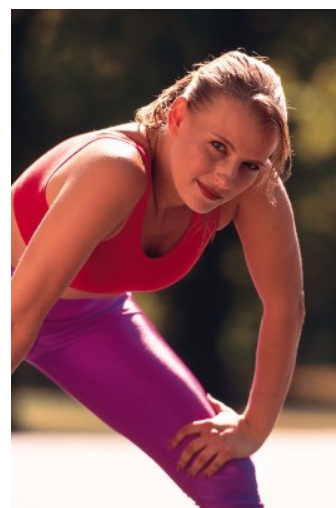
It's not always easy to stop harmful behaviors, especially when they have become addictions. There is no shame in seeking outside help to assist you in your efforts. Ask your doctor or medical provider for a referral.

2. Exercise. Maintain your current exercise routine to keep your blood flowing, Dr. Binkley says. It's not a good time to begin a vigorous exercise routine when you're trying to get pregnant or during your pregnancy. "The best exercise during pregnancy is walking," she says. "A good routine to work toward and to sustain throughout pregnancy and postpartum is walking 45 minutes, five times per week."

3. Maintain a healthy weight. "If a woman is overweight or underweight, she decreases her chance of conception," Vincent says. "Normal production of estrogen is increased for obese women, and abnormal hormone levels can interfere with conception. Eating snacks like nutrition bars can help a woman's body be healthy; a healthy, well nourished body is more likely to conceive than one that is not."

4. Get your ZZZs. It's important to get enough sleep when you're trying to conceive. Don't get run down, says Eunice Kan, an acupuncturist in Burlingame, Calif.

Most sleep experts agree that seven to eight hours of sleep each night is a good target for the average adult. If you are falling short of this recommendation, try setting up a bedtime routine that includes a warm bath before bed and some downtime, like reading or journaling, rather than watching television.



4 Alternatives

1. Try acupuncture. Acupuncture is a great way to speed up conception, Kan says. It helps women to relax their body and mind and keeps them healthy. It helps to balance any hormonal issues they may be experiencing, such as irregular cycles, painful periods and endometriosis.

"For an average healthy woman, an acupuncture treatment of one to two times a week, plus taking herbs every day, is a good idea to boost fertility," Kan says. An average session takes about an hour, which includes a health consultation.

2. Take herbs. A common herbal formula used to boost fertility is Si Wu Tang, which consists of white peony root, Chinese angelica root, Chinese foxglove (rehmannia) and Sichuan lovage root (endium). This can be taken after menstruating to help tonify the blood lost monthly and to rebalance the body, Kan says.

Before taking any herbs for conception, consult a trusted expert.

3. Engage in yoga and/or meditation. Yoga and meditation can help women trying to conceive to attain relaxation. Yoga cat stretches are ideal to get the energy moving in vital parts of the body and reproductive energy centers. Do these for one-minute intervals throughout the day, says Clare, who is president of SPISE Bliss. She uses the framework of SPISE (spiritual, physical, intellectual, sexual and emotional) to help couples conceive naturally.

Visualize. Practice seeing yourself pregnant, Clare says. "Meditate for one minute each day with this wonderful vision in your mind," she says.

4. Be positive. Erase worry from your mind. Worrying about not getting pregnant creates a negative impact on your body, Clare says. Increase your "feel good" endorphins by reading funny and inspirational stories. Enjoy your time as a couple, Clare says. "Unhappiness puts a large stress on the woman's body and acts as a barrier to conception."