

## SAY NO TO

**WITH THESE RESULTS IN HAND IT IS TIME TO TAKE STOCK OF THE IMPACT OF OUR MODERN LIFESTYLES.**

It is widely accepted that the rat race and associated personal behaviours have a detrimental impact on our health. Many of these same factors may limit a couple's ability to conceive. For any prospective baby-making couple the following is taboo:

### Unhealthy body weight.

About 12% of infertility cases result from the woman being over- or underweight. To increase your chances of conception, aim for a body mass index (BMI) of between 20 and 25.

**Alcohol.** Most people are aware of the detrimental effects that alcohol can have on a pregnancy by causing fetal alcohol syndrome. However, moderate drinking

while trying to conceive also reduces fertility. According to the British Medical Journal, women who had as few as 1-5 glasses a week had a decreased probability of conception.

**Smoking.** Cigarette smoke has been shown to increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, and low-birth-weight babies in women. Smoking by either partner reduces the chance of conceiving with each cycle by one-third.

**Drugs.** Enough said.

**Caffeine.** Evidence is mixed, but more than one cup a day can affect female fertility as caffeine intake is associated with a longer time to conception. The link between a high caffeine intake and miscarriage is also well established. According to a 2008 study, pregnant women who consumed more than two cups of coffee a day had double the risk of miscarriage compared to caffeine abstainers. Be aware of your overall caffeine intake as caffeine is also contained in products such as tea, cola, energy drinks and chocolate.

**Excessive stress.** Our bodies are equipped to prevent

conception from occurring during times of extreme stress. The presence of hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol, which are released during stressful times, signal our bodies that conditions are not ideal for conception. These stress hormones inhibit the body's main sex hormones GnRH (gonadotropin releasing hormone) and the utilisation of progesterone, while also releasing higher levels of prolactin, which are all detrimental to fertility. In short, excessive stress will result not only in suppressed sexual activity, but, in severe cases, suppressed ovulation too.

## Make these health and physical changes

Reviewing the list above, these are typical items that one would find on the New Year's resolution list of your wannabe health nut. Every year. Worthy as they may be, most of us experience high New Year's resolution failure rates.

How, then, do we make these health and physical wellness changes to ensure that our modern lifestyles don't halt our reproduction capabilities? The truth is that, unless there is something fundamentally wrong, honing the body into a fine-tuned baby-making machine is, in principle, a mind game.

**Here's what we mean by that:** to reach any goal (physical or other) we need to commit our minds to drive the type of behaviours that would facilitate the desired result. Approaching lifestyle changes with a mindset of "I want to" instead of "I have to" is often the key to sustained improvement.



Minimize stress, try meditation



Watch what you eat. Stay away from preserved food and stick to clean free range chicken and organic vegetables

Keep active. Good exercise for fertility includes swimming, yoga, walking, pilates and belly dancing.



## WHAT FERTILITY-BOOSTING BEHAVIOUR SHOULD WE THEN BE SETTING OUR MINDS TO?

## SAY YES TO

**GOOD NUTRITION.** At an intuitive level we probably all know that a balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables is what's required for general health. The same applies to fertility. Foods rich in antioxidants. These include: berries, various fruits and dried fruits, vegetables (especially the brightly coloured ones), ginger, garlic, legumes, cereals, nuts and seeds, and (happily) dark chocolate.

**A DAILY PRENATAL VITAMIN CONTAINING FOLIC ACID** (vitamin B9). It is widely known that folic acid (400-800 micrograms) reduces the risk of birth defects once you're pregnant, but some studies have also shown that women who take folic acid supplements before falling pregnant conceive at a higher rate.

**GETTING ACTIVE.** As it is in life, so it is in fertility – an active lifestyle with regular exercise is undeniably good for you. Women who exercise 30 minutes or more daily have a reduced risk of infertility due to ovulation disorders, according to a study published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. On the other hand, too much vigorous exercise was linked to lowered fertility in a 2009 study in *Human Reproduction*, and a Harvard study of elite athletes. So, the recommendation for women whose bodies are used to a high level of exercise is to maintain a certain level of exercise, while others who do very little exercise will need to start their routine gently. Good exercise for fertility includes swimming, yoga, walking, Pilates and belly dancing.

**MINIMISING STRESS.** Take care of yourself and your relationship by managing stress and practicing healthy coping methods such as relaxation techniques, exercise, and seeking help if needed.

*Like most changes in habit, there are no quick fixes and modified behaviour takes a while to have an effect and become ingrained as second nature. However, research predicts that once you've attained your fertility health goals you'll have improved fertility readings three months later.*

*The take home message here is: by starting to take care of your fertility health now – even years before you're planning to get pregnant – you should be in a much better position to see not only your children, but even your children's children.*