

10 Ways to Address Your Root Causes of Infertility -- Naturally

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By Iva Keene

Infertility is an alarming modern epidemic affecting more couples than ever. 1 out of 6 couples today experience difficulty falling pregnant. What was once seen as a woman's problem is now known to affect men equally.

10 Strategies you can Immediately Implement to Treat Infertility and Boost Fertility Naturally

The natural approach to treating infertility solves the root causes of infertility, by addressing all body systems, rather than just focusing solely on the reproductive system.

Many couples who can't fall pregnant suffer from a combination of sub-clinical conditions. These conditions can't cause infertility on their own but -- in combination -- they can substantially reduce a couple's probability of conceiving. For example; a gluten intolerance alone cannot cause infertility; however, the resulting inflammation in the gut can minimize your nutrient absorption and lead to deficiencies in nutrients you need for optimal sperm, egg and hormone production and a healthy pregnancy. Exposure to heavy metals, radiation, and toxic chemicals in some foods, drugs and other products can damage DNA. Recent Nutrigenomic (a study of the effects of nutrients on gene expression) research suggests what we eat can influence our gene structure and expression.

1. Minimize your exposure to toxic chemicals

Exposure to environmental toxins (in the form of industrial chemicals) both in utero and neonatally may dramatically affect adult fertility. Most chemicals used in everyday life do not go through the same checks medicines do. Consequently, poisonous chemicals end up circulating in our environment, food supply, air and water. The strongest evidence of heavy metals and environmental pollution adversely interfering with healthy reproductive function in women has been found for lead. Other compounds that can alter hormone function and result in adverse reproductive health effects include:

- Ovotoxicants: can disrupt or even stop ovulation.
- Endocrine disruptors: can interfere with hormone function and cause endometriosis and PCOS.
- Phthalates: in plastic food containers, cling wrap, IV bags, medical supplies, vinyl flooring and packaging at high levels have been associated with miscarriage and testicular toxicity. At low levels they disrupt hormonal balance.
- VCH chemicals: used in rubber tires, plastics and pesticides.
- PAH: released from cigarettes, car fumes and road tar

Men are not spared!

Sperm seems to be more sensitive to heavy metals and industrial pollutants than eggs. Many sperm abnormalities have been linked to these toxins. The majority of these chemicals can be found in the atmosphere, on the ground in cities and in the waterways. They have also been termed "reprotoxicants" for their negative effects on sperm development and maturation. Studies confirm male sperm counts are declining, and environmental factors, such as pesticides, exogenous estrogens (Xenoestrogens), and heavy metals may negatively impact spermatogenesis (formation of sperm).

The top 6 environmental toxins avoid

1. Pesticides: found on non-organic fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy and unfiltered tap water
2. Formaldehyde: found in air fresheners, deodorants, floor polish, upholstery cleaners

3. Bisphenols: found in plastic containers and can leach into food and water.
4. Organic solvents: petroleum based liquids found in household products, electronics, car repair, health care, photography, agriculture, printing, construction and cosmetics and many more.
5. Dry-cleaning chemicals
6. Paint fumes

Occasional exposure to one or the other toxic chemical is not of concern. What is of concern is accumulation of these chemicals over a long period.

2. Don't drink unfiltered tap water

Our waterways are constantly being polluted by industrial waste and byproducts, pharmaceutical drugs, pesticides and herbicides and commercial cleaning products. There are many companies polluting the water regardless of the country you live in. Either there is no environmental law at all, or there are loop holes in the law or there is no law for the XYZ chemical getting into the water.

Heavy metals are the most common of the reprotoxins reaching our water supply through industrial waste, jet fuel exhaust residue and a variety of other sources.

Pharmaceutical drugs are commonly found in tap water. 74 percent of the US population take prescription drugs. Because the drugs do not metabolize fully, small quantities are excreted via feces and urine and flushed away. Toilet water is often treated and filtered before being discharged into lakes and rivers thereby re-entering the water supply. The trouble is, many drugs are not filtered out via the regular filtration process. Minute quantities of chemotherapy drugs, contraceptive pills, antidepressants, anxiolitics, anabolic steroids, HRT (hormone replacement therapy), heart drugs etc. have been found in tap water.

Use a dual filtration system

Buy a dual filtration water system which filters particles smaller than 1 micron (this will filter out the drugs as well as heavy metals). Use the filter in your shower and your kitchen. Shower steam contains the same chemicals which you can end up inhaling and can be absorbed through your skin.

3. Aim to eat an optimal fertility diet

In the first trimester of pregnancy your growing embryo will increase 20 million times. In the first 8 weeks your baby's organs, hands, fingers, legs, feet, head, eyes, nose, ears etc. are being constructed. To ensure the best possible foundations are laid down during this phase, you want to make sure there are plenty of building blocks in the form of the right nutrients in the right combinations.

What does a fertility diet contain?

An optimal fertility diet is about what to avoid as much as it is about what to include. A fertility diet should be as fresh as possible and organic wherever possible. Key elements are; good quality protein sources (favor vegetable sources of protein) and good fats.

What should you eat?

- Organic meat in small quantities, game, small deep sea fish like sardines and red snapper, organic legumes home cooked (not canned).
- Whole grains, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit in season, organic where possible.
- Increase your consumption of good fats and avoid dangerous fats. Good fats include; monounsaturated fats in olive oil, polyunsaturated fats in oily fish and nuts and midchain fatty acids found in coconut oil.

- For cooking use clarified butter (ghee) or coconut butter (without flavor) as they do not become unstable when heated.
- For non heated oil requirements (salads etc) use cold pressed olive oil, flaxseed oil and nut oils.

4. **Avoid dangerous fats**

Did you know -- consuming trans fats hidden in foods such as; doughnuts, biscuits, lollies, candy, chocolate, chips, pies, fries, take aways and thousands of other foods may increase your risk of **infertility by as much as 70 percent**? Scientists from the Harvard University School of Public Health advise women wanting to get pregnant to avoid *all* trans fats. The sole purpose of adding trans fats to food is to extend its shelf life. To minimize your consumption of trans fats be diligent about reading the ingredients and avoid the most likely culprits altogether. Trans fats are mostly listed as 'hydrogenated fat' or 'hardened vegetable fat' or simply 'vegetable fat'.

5. **Minimize animal derived estrogens**

Dairy products account on average for 60-70 percent of estrogens consumed. Humans consume milk from cows in the second half of pregnancy when cows estrogen levels are high. We usually associate dairy and drinking milk with calcium, and never think about what else we may be consuming along with the calcium (and dairy, by the way is not the best source of calcium). Here is a list of hormones which have been found in cows milk:

Prolactin, somatostatin, melatonin, oxytocin, growth hormone, lutenizing releasing hormone, thyroid stimulating hormone, estrogens, progesterone, insulin, corticosteroids and many more. Do you think an excess consumption of all these hormones could disrupt your own hormonal balance? You bet!

Consumption of milk has been linked to certain cases of male infertility. Excess estrogen and pesticide exposure has been linked to PCOS and Endometriosis. Studies have found higher concentrations of pesticides in cheese than in non-organically grown fruit and vegetables. The first line of naturopathic treatment I recommend for PCOS and Endometriosis is to minimize intake of animal products. Animal products have a high content of hormones, pesticides and herbicides which are known endocrine disruptors. They play havoc with your hormones and this can lead to anovulation.

6. **Avoid the two most common allergens**

The link between food intolerances and anti-sperm antibodies is now well established. Studies have found that women with multiple allergies and food intolerances were more likely to miscarry. An overactive immune system is more likely to attack its own body cells. From an immunological point of view an embryo and sperm cell are foreign bodies. But Mother Nature was clever; she programmed our immune systems to distinguish between an everyday invader and a sperm cell or embryo.

A normal and healthy immune response to an embryo or sperm cell is orchestrated by Th2 cytokines. They suppress your killer cells (that's what they are called) to leave the embryo unharmed. Because of this protection many pregnant women are poor wound healers and can come down really badly with a cold or flu. Your natural protection has been suppressed so that your baby can develop properly.

An abnormal immune response to the implantation of the fertilized egg is orchestrated by Th1 cytokines. Rather than suppressing your killer cells they stimulate their activity. This can lead to defects and the loss of the fetus.

The two most widely spread food intolerances are gluten and dairy. I recommend all my patients have an IgG immunoglobulin test done to check if you are dairy and gluten intolerant. But since most people have some

level of allergy to gluten and/or dairy, it's advisable to avoid gluten and dairy altogether during the preconception and pregnancy period.

7. Have an STD check

Most people believe both they and their partner are STD free. However there are some STD's which can be asymptomatic, meaning that you may not be aware you have them, as there are no obvious symptoms. One such STD is a Chlamydia infection. In men, a Chlamydia infection can lead to sperm abnormalities including sperm antibodies. In women, it can lead to scarring, blocked tubes and miscarriage. A study found 60% of asymptomatic male partners of infected females attending a fertility clinic were found to be infected with Chlamydia. Most STD's are easy to treat, so it pays for both partners to have an STD check. There is no point in only one partner going for a test as the other partner can re-infect them again.

8. Allow yourself 120 days before trying to conceive

There is a common misconception that egg and sperm quality can not be improved. In fact, it is possible to improve the quality of your egg and sperm however, it takes 120 days. This is because it takes approximately 120 days for eggs to mature and sperm to develop. During the generation and maturation of gamete cells -- sperm and ovum -- that form an embryo, everything that you and your partner ingest, inhale or are exposed to will influence the health of your eggs and sperm for better or worse, and the ultimate quality of the genetic building blocks you pass onto your child. This is why it's crucial to follow a good preconception plan for a minimum of 4 months before conception. A baby is a 50-50 product of his or her parents -- therefore optimizing the quality of eggs and sperm is of paramount importance. Sperm disorders contribute to 40% of infertility cases. Woman who suffer from recurrent miscarriages often have partners with low sperm counts and visually abnormal sperm. Therefore both partners should detox, follow a fertility diet, take preconception supplements and avoid reproductive toxins discussed in this article for minimum of 4 months before conception.

9. Avoid coffee, smoking and alcohol

You may not want to hear this, but drinking coffee decreases fertility. A large study from Connecticut found as little as 1 cup of coffee per day increases the risk of not conceiving by 55 percent. And if you have 2-3 cups per day that risk rises to 100 percent and continues to increase with an additional cup up to 176 percent. And did you know that women who drank coffee before and during pregnancy had twice the risk of miscarriage?

Alcohol is harmful to women's eggs and men's sperm and as little as *one* glass can reduce fertility by 50 percent! This can further lead to damage of the developing embryo and may result in miscarriage. And although it's been known for a long time that drinking while pregnant is a no-no, drinking *before* pregnancy has been largely ignored.

This doesn't stop with coffee and alcohol. Smoking and recreational drugs can also reduce your odds of conception. A study tested the effects of cigarette smoking on semen quality in men and found that sperm motility (ability to propel forward) decreased in light smokers while heavy smoking produced abnormal sperm shape. Scientists have discovered that quitting smoking may increase sperm count in men who quit smoking for 5-15 months by 50 percent to 800 percent respectively.

10. Take a good quality preconception and pregnancy supplement

Regardless of whether you are eating organic produce and a healthy diet, you are unlikely to be getting all the nutrients your body needs for optimal fertility from your diet. This is why supplementation is important. Getting pregnant and growing a new human being with your own reserves, requires a surplus of nutrients and energy. In your body's accounting terms, pregnancy is a luxury, a splurge of energy and nutrients. Some of the key nutrients for fertility are: zinc, selenium, magnesium, calcium, B12, B6, folic acid, vitamin C and omega 3 essential fatty acids.

For more detailed information on treating infertility naturally including specific information on all fertility nutrients, the right dosages, fertility diet, what to avoid, and the influence of stress and sleep on fertility, please refer to my fertility program ***The Natural Fertility Prescription*** which goes into much more detail on this topic. If you want to undertake a preconception program or address a specific fertility condition naturally, I highly suggest you buy the actual eBook -- see my website Natural-Fertility-Prescription.com for more info.

IVF does not address the root cause of infertility

When we take a closer look at IVF it is far less safe and less effective than we are often led to believe. As well as being invasive and prohibitively expensive for many, IVF treatments carry a substantial health risk to both the mother and baby.

Conventional IVF and other assisted reproductive technology (ART) treatments don't address root causes of infertility. These root causes include: nutritional deficiencies, toxin exposure, stress, food intolerances, allergies and immune deficiencies. These subtle but critical factors interact synergistically to impact the quality of your eggs and sperm, affecting your ability to conceive and the health of your embryo.

Counting the financial cost of IVF

Recent media reports of grandparents funding their children's IVF treatments in the hope of a grandchild illustrate the financial strain these treatments can pose to couples. While celebrities and wealthy couples can afford it, many struggle with treatments costing thousands of dollars (\$5000 to \$150,000 per live birth is typical). Even couples who can afford IVF are starting to examine more closely the potential health complications for mother and child and are turning to complementary and alternative treatment options.

How safe is IVF?

Many people think IVF is relatively safe -- but is it really? Multiple studies have reported a high risk of birth deformity including brain disorders, developmental delays and genital malformations. Dr. Alastair Sutcliffe of the Institute of Child Health at the University College London and Dr. Michael Ludwid of the Centre for Reproductive Medicine and Gynecologic Endocrinology in Hamburg have advised IVF children be monitored well into adulthood as there is no long term data on their health as adults. On top of that, scientists have warned mothers who undergo IVF treatments of increased health risks to reproductive organs including uterine cancer in later life.

IVF as the *final* option after preconception care

IVF should be the last option after all natural treatment options have been exhausted. It should never be the first option. The rate of success of IVF is (on average) 25 percent per single attempt. Studies show that by following a natural preconception program prior to attempting IVF the success rate is increased to 47.1 percent per single attempt. I always advise couples to undertake a preconception program as a first step and reserve IVF as a final option. Most infertility can be treated without IVF. However, if IVF *is* needed the success rate of each attempt is nearly doubled by combining it with a natural preconception program.

Summary

IVF should *never* be the first option for treating infertility. Natural infertility treatments are generally more effective, as well as being cheaper, safer and less invasive. In addition -- when compared to IVF -- natural infertility treatments invariably offer better long term health outcomes for both mother and baby. Infertility -- for the majority of couples -- is *not* an incurable disease.

A more suitable description would be: *a temporary condition caused by nutritional deficiencies and excessive toxin accumulation*. Your level of fertility and the quality of your eggs and sperm is determined by many small but crucial factors. When combined these factors add up to the difference between fertility and infertility. Pregnancy -- a creation of a new human being -- requires a toxin-free internal and external environment,

enormous surplus building blocks in the form of nutrients and good energy reserves. In addition to this; specific bacteria and viruses can interfere with a growing embryo, resulting in miscarriage or birth malformations.

Toxins from the environment, drugs and many commercial cleaning and body care products can disrupt your hormonal balance and lead to infertility. As such you need to be aware of those factors before you embark on this amazing journey. You need to prepare for your pregnancy as you would for an important trip. Good preparation will not only minimize the chance of complications and heartache down the track, but will also ensure the healthiest baby possible.

After all, the greatest gift you can give your child is robust health and the best of your partner and yourself. Even if your only option is IVF -- at it should *never* be the first option -- it pays to optimize the quality of your eggs and sperm with a good preconception program *before* you undertake the procedure to maximize the success rate and prepare your body for pregnancy.

Source:

Keene, I. 2008, "Natural Fertility Prescription", Switzerland.

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Iva Keene is the author of the *Natural Fertility Prescription*; a home study course that walks you through 7 steps to optimal fertility. Iva's Web site, <http://www.natural-fertility-prescription.com>, an invaluable resource for couples wanting to get pregnant, offers dozens of tips for boosting fertility naturally and addressing infertility conditions.

Reference website: <http://blogs.mercola.com/sites/vitalvotes/archive/2009/10/14/10-ways-to-address-your-root-causes-of-infertility--naturally.aspx>