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Naturopathic Medicine & Infertility

The inability to conceive after at least a year of regular sexual intercourse without the use of contraceptives can be due to causes that lie either in the man or the woman or both. There are many approaches that can be taken to treat infertility with Naturopathic Medicine, and since each patient is unique this allows for an approach and a program tailored specifically to each person.

I. Nutrition

The nutritional status of the person(s) trying to conceive is very important. The basic building blocks of the body such as vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats and carbohydrates are necessary in a well-balanced diet for a healthy conception and pregnancy. Studies have shown that women who have trouble conceiving have deficiencies in folic acid, vitamins B6, B12, zinc, magnesium and iron. There is also a correlation between heavy metal toxicity as well as long-term use of birth control pills and infertility.

The importance of healthy organic food cannot be stressed enough! Our main agricultural systems are no longer producing food of the same quality as just 20 years ago. The food may look good, but the nutritional value leaves something to be desired! Not only has the nutritional content of food deteriorated, but the level of chemicals, pesticides, herbicides, exogenous estrogens, etc. has increased exponentially as well, creating quite a burden on our livers. The increase in toxic chemicals that we are all being exposed to has been partly to blame for infertility in modern society. This just accentuates the fact that having your liver working optimally in neutralizing these compounds is of the utmost importance.

For men, increasing foods that contain zinc can be helpful as well as vitamin E, vitamin C, and magnesium. For women, looking at supporting the adrenal glands and the liver as well as checking the functioning of the thyroid (hypothyroidism can affect the ability to conceive) can be helpful in an infertility situation. Essential fatty acids such as flax seed oil can be beneficial to both sexes and deficiencies have been shown to cause a thickening of cervical mucous and a decrease in sperm survival. Both men and women should look at improving their cardiovascular system, decreasing their cholesterol levels, improving their lipid profiles and decreasing their intake of animal products (especially if not organic) since they may contain diethylstilbestrol (DES) residues. DES increases the risk of infertility and was used quite extensively in pregnant woman between 1938 and 1971 and is now affecting the children of these women.

II. Some Basic Lifestyle Changes That You Can Do Yourself

1. Kick the habit! Smoking, Alcohol, Caffeine, Recreational & Medicinal Drugs

Cigarette smoke has been shown to decrease fertility in both men and women whether inhaled directly or as secondhand smoke. Researchers in England report that smoking diminishes fertilization in women by two-thirds. Cigarette smoke has been shown to decrease the number of eggs a woman produces each month which may be partially due to the higher levels of male hormones such as androgen and testosterone found in smoking women.

Smoking also interferes with reproduction due to its effect on nutrients such as vitamin C whose levels decrease by 20 to 40 percent in men who smoke one pack of cigarettes per day. When vitamin C drops, a man's sperm are more sluggish and have a tendency to clump together and there are more abnormally formed sperm with fewer sperm overall.

Alcohol reduces fertility and can lead to a cessation of menstruation. It also increases the rate of miscarriages. Marijuana disrupts the ovarian cycle while antihistamines dry up cervical fluid and interfere with sperm survival. Caffeine has been shown to increase the amount of time it takes to conceive a child. The probability of requiring more than 12 months to conceive was 80% higher for high coffee consumers (>4 cups / day) than non-consumers.

2. Stop dieting!

Research in Germany on the effects of dieting on women's menstrual cycles showed disturbances in the luteal (second) half of the cycle of women who lost more than 2 pounds per week. These changes could possibly be

explained by the decrease in prolactin that occurred while these women were dieting. Lower prolactin was correlated with decreased estrogen levels. All of these reproductive disturbances could compromise fertility. It should be noted though that a woman of normal weight is more fertile than one who is either too fat or too thin.

3. Timing

It is well documented that men's semen quality and count varies throughout the year reaching its peak as winter ends and spring begins (Feb to Mar). There is a similar trend in women, showing conception using insemination more common from early winter to early spring (Oct to Mar with November being the most fruitful). A woman's fertility also peaks at a specific time each month and the use of natural family planning methods such as observing and charting cervical mucus, basal body temperature and other fertility signs can help pinpoint when conception will most likely occur.

4. Exercise/Relaxation

Getting regular exercise is also very important, as well as using some relaxation tools such as meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, prayer, or deep breathing

II. Herbal Medicine

There is much that herbs can contribute to in supporting fertility. Hormonal problems, in either partner, are readily treated herbally. A very important herb is *Vitex agnus castus* (*Chaste Tree Berry*) which, although it does not contain the hormone progesterone, affects the pituitary gland in such a way that it corrects and regulates the secretion of progesterone from the ovaries. It also corrects any hormone deficiency of either estrogen or progesterone.

Chamaelirium luteum (False unicorn root) is used in Britain most frequently for female infertility as well as impotence. It is regarded as a powerful and effective tonic for the uterus and ovaries and has the effect of correcting hormonal imbalances. Two herbs that are great for nourishing the body in preparation for conception are *Trifolium pratense* (Red Clover) and *Urtica dioica* (Stinging Nettle). They both have high protein, mineral and vitamin content. Red Clover also contains high amounts of absorbable calcium and magnesium, while Nettle has a high chlorophyll content. Botanicals that can be used to support the liver are *Taraxacum officinalis* (Dandelion Root) and *Silybum marianum* (Milk Thistle).

These are just a few of the herbs that could be beneficial in an infertility situation. There are many more useful herbs and as each person is unique, each herbal formula will be unique and reflect the state of that person.

III. Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine:

Chinese herbs and acupuncture can be very helpful when trying to conceive. When looking at infertility from a Chinese Medicine perspective, there are many different syndromes and causes that could be determined. The basic causes for infertility in a woman, according to Chinese medicine, are: constitutional weakness, overwork, excessive physical work, excessive sexual activity at an early age, invasion of cold (common in young women especially in Britain) and diet. The acupuncture and herbal treatment would correspond with the diagnosis and would be very different for each person depending on the cause.

Acupuncture Anecdote : LUCKY NUMBER SIX by William Dronyk ND

A young twenty-six year old patient wanted desperately to get pregnant. She hadn't had a period in 18 months and her medical doctor claimed she probably hadn't ovulated in 4 years. After her first acupuncture treatment, she asked me how long it would be before she had her first period. I estimated anywhere from 6 weeks to 6 months. She returned the following week for her second treatment and exclaimed I was a little off in my calculations, as it didn't take 6 weeks or 6 months but 6 hours before she had her first period. On her sixth visit she expressed her disappointment about the fact that she hadn't had a second period. I changed the acupuncture formula that day and at the end of the treatment I suggested she buy a home pregnancy test kit, just in case. She called me later that day and joyously announced she was pregnant. Nine months later she gave birth to a healthy, normal baby boy.

IV. Homeopathy

Homeopathy is another approach that can successfully be used to help a couple or a woman conceive. An in-depth case is taken and analyzed for the correct homeopathic remedy to be identified. *Sepia* is one of the many

possible remedies that may be used in an infertility situation. Some of the keynotes for this remedy are worn-out, indifferent, weeping, overwhelmed and irritable people with premenstrual depression and who are better from vigorous exercise.

This shows the diversity of approaches that can be taken when treating an infertility case with Naturopathic Medicine. As previously stated, each case is unique and therefore Naturopathic Medicine allows for an approach specifically designed for that case.

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