

## FACTSHEET

### DIETARY INFORMATION

When trying for a baby it is important that you are eating a healthy diet with a balanced intake of protein, carbohydrate, healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. This will not only give your baby a good start in life but will also give you the best chance of conceiving.

The general advice for healthy eating is to eat a well balanced diet which includes:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Complex carbohydrates - wholegrains like brown rice, oats and wholemeal bread
- Organic foods where possible
- Oily foods such as fish, nuts, seeds and oils
- Reduce your intake of saturated fats from dairy products, etc
- Avoid trans fats
- Increase your intake of fibre
- More fish and organic eggs than red meat
- Avoid additives, preservatives and chemicals, such as artificial sweeteners
- Reduce or avoid sugar, both on its own and hidden in food
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine eg coffee, tea, chocolate, colas
- A low salt intake
- Eliminate processed foods as much as possible

### Weight

Fertility can be affected by being either overweight or underweight so for this reason both you and your partner should aim to adopt a healthy lifestyle for 3-6 months before conception and should maintain this throughout your pregnancy. An easy way of checking that you are not over or under weight is to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI) which is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in metres - there is an online calculator on the NHS Choices website to help (<http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Healthyweightcalculator.aspx>). For most adults, a healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9.

### Folic Acid

This vitamin is important in the early development of a baby and can prevent spina bifida. It is essential that you get plenty both before and during pregnancy. The Department of Health recommends that all women planning a pregnancy take a daily supplement of 400mcg of folic acid from up to three months before they conceive and for the first twelve weeks of pregnancy.

### Zinc

Zinc is a widely studied nutrient in terms of fertility for both men and women, and a zinc deficiency can cause chromosome changes leading to reduced fertility and an increased risk of miscarriage. Zinc is found in high concentrations in the sperm and is needed to make the outer layer and tail of the sperm.

### Selenium

Selenium is an antioxidant that helps to protect your body from free radicals. Good levels of selenium help to maximise sperm formation. Blood selenium levels have been found to be lower in men with low sperm counts.

## **Omega 3 Essential Fatty Acids**

These essential fats found in oily fish, nuts and seeds have an effect on every system of the body, including the reproductive system and they are crucial for healthy hormone functioning. For men, essential fatty acid supplementation is important because the semen is rich in prostaglandins, which are produced from these fats. Men with poor sperm quality, abnormal sperm, poor motility or low count, can have inadequate amounts of these beneficial prostaglandins. Omega 3 fatty acids are crucial for the brain development of the baby, so are important during pregnancy. It is not advisable to take cod liver oil during pregnancy because of the high vitamin A content. Oil from the body of the fish rather than the liver is fine. Oily fish contains Omega 3 fatty acids, but fish that are predatory and live a long time can contain higher levels of mercury so it is best to avoid shark, swordfish and marlin. Fish oil supplements are fine as long as you know they are from a reputable source.

## **Vitamin E**

Vitamin E is an antioxidant. If you are a woman and over 35 and you have been told that your fertility problems are caused by your age, then you are likely to benefit from taking both vitamins E and C.

## **Vitamin C**

Vitamin C is also an antioxidant and studies suggest that vitamin C may enhance sperm quality as well as being beneficial for female fertility.

## **L-Arginine**

This is an amino acid found in many foods and the head of the sperm contains an exceptional amount of this nutrient, which is important for sperm production. Supplementing with L-arginine may help to increase both the sperm count and quality.

## **L-Carnitine**

This amino acid is essential for normal functioning of sperm cells.

## **Lifestyle**

**Taking vitamin supplements:** Taking a good multi-vitamin and mineral supplement can be helpful when trying to conceive (making sure that it is designed for pregnancy) as well as eating a healthy diet. Supplementation is especially important if you are on a restricted diet eg vegan.

**Smoking:** Stopping smoking is probably the most important single thing that you and your partner can do for you and your future baby's health as smoking has an impact on both male and female fertility.

**Alcohol:** Alcohol can have an affect on your chances of conceiving, and can affect the fertility of both men and women. The best advice to follow if you are trying to conceive is to give up alcohol before conception and during your pregnancy.

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