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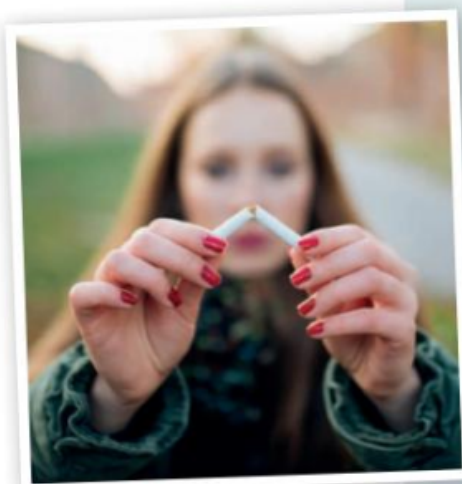
YOUR PRE-PREGNANCY WELLNESS PLAN

Top health tips for preparing your body and mind for pregnancy

If you are planning to get pregnant then a few diet and lifestyle changes will help to increase your chances of conceiving. And that goes for both the mum and dad-to-be! Here we speak to a range of natural health experts to get their top tips for supporting your fertility.

Stop smoking and reduce alcohol

“Stopping smoking is the single most important thing you can do to improve your long-term health,” says obstetrician, gynaecologist and founder of The Maternity Collective, Dr Ellie Rayner (@maternitymedic). “It is also one of the most important things you can do to improve your future baby’s health, growth and development.” Dr Rayner adds: “If you are considering pregnancy, or trying to conceive, the general advice is to avoid alcohol as it can affect both male and female fertility. And when you drink whilst pregnant, alcohol passes through the placenta to your baby.”



Start taking folic acid

“You should ideally be taking folic acid daily for two months before you conceive, to have the maximum protection for your baby against a birth defect that can affect the spinal cord,” explains Dr Rayner. “Some women are recommended to take a higher dose of folic acid that is only available on prescription, such as if your BMI is greater than 30, so speak to your GP to make sure you are on the correct dose.” Booking a check-up with your GP is a good idea anyway, if you are considering trying to get pregnant. “Pre-existing medical problems can make a pregnancy and birth more complicated,” says Dr Rayner. “But if we know about your family plans in advance, we can alter any medication that may be harmful or put in place extra treatment to help reduce the risk.”





Great things come in small packages

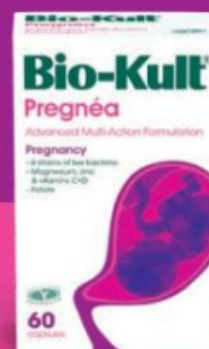


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Start exercising if you don't already

“Unfortunately, being overweight can affect your fertility, cause additional health problems during pregnancy, such as miscarriage or pregnancy diabetes and even affect the future health of your child,” says Dr Rayner. “If you are considering pregnancy, or are already pregnant, it is never too late to start introducing some exercise into your daily or weekly routine – even reducing your BMI by one or two points before conception can make a big difference.”

Try some yoga

“Trying to get pregnant can be a fun, but also stressful time, so doing anything you can to help you relax can make a big difference,” says Cheryl MacDonald, founder of YogaBellies. “Breathing techniques used in yoga meditations and postures help you to relax, calming the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps to reduce stress and relax the body. In fact, there have been studies in America which have revealed that women who practise mind/body techniques achieved pregnancies at a rate almost three times higher than those who didn't (Dr Alice Domar, 2002). This is because yoga benefits the reproductive functions, both in men and women, by improving the overall integration of physiological systems, reducing stress and balancing the neurohormonal profile. Yoga also lets mothers prepare for the actual birth as well, using physical yoga postures, meditation and yogic breathing techniques.” Find your nearest class here: yogabellies.com

Strengthen your gut microbiome

“The human microbiota or microbiome is the community of microorganisms that live on and in the human body, including bacteria, archaea, fungi, and viruses,” explains Dr Nauf AlBendar (www.thewombeffect.co). “Most microbiome research is currently limited to the intestines, which hosts the most diverse and abundant microbial community in the body. But we also harbour this microbial universe in other areas of our body, including the mouth, skin, seminal fluid (if you are a man), and vagina. The state of our biome in all these areas of our body is correlated to the success of conception, the health and maintenance of our future pregnancy, our pregnancy outcome, and eventually the health of our baby. Here are some ways to optimise the microbiomes of both parents:



Improving the diet. Eating more fermented and cultured foods will introduce probiotics to your biome. Fermented foods will not only “reseed” your gut with health-promoting microorganisms but are outstanding sources of essential nutrients such as B vitamins and K2. Try to include a variety of these cultured foods and beverages in your diet, since they contain a range of different bugs, thus optimising your microbial diversity. You also need to provide nourishment for your existing beneficial microbes. You can do that by having fibre daily: it can serve as a prebiotic, providing good food for your probiotics.

Supplementing with probiotics. Studies have shown that probiotic supplementation can reduce a baby's risk of certain non-communicable diseases during pregnancy. But it seems wise to supplement before pregnancy, considering the key foetal developmental milestones that happen in the womb in the early weeks. When it comes to the vaginal microbiome, oral *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* and *Lactobacillus fermentum* supplementation have been shown to restore healthy vaginal flora in up to 82 per cent of women with previous vaginal dysbiosis as well as reducing the risk of infection, subsequent inflammation, and immune dysfunction. This can be beneficial for fertility and conception. For men, research has found that supplementing with *Lactobacillus brevis*, *Lactobacillus plantarum*, and *Lactobacillus salivarius* preserved sperm motility and viability in vitro. Remember to look for supplements with at least 10 billion (and preferably up to 100 billion) CFUs (colony forming units), and store the supplements as directed on the package.

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Male fertility focus

Leading nutritionist Dr Marilyn Glenville offers some tips on male fertility support

For many years it has been thought that age only mattered with women when it came to fertility but we now know that the age of the man counts too. Research has shown that with men over the age of 35 the count is lower, the sperm are less motile and the risk of miscarriage is increased in women whose partners are over the age of 35. The other finding is that over the age of 35, a man's body is less capable of seeking out and destroying damaged sperm, resulting in sperm with more DNA damage. This means that either there is less chance of getting pregnant or that a pregnancy could lead to a miscarriage or birth defects.

There is a growing body of evidence to show that diet has a significant impact on sperm health and numbers. A good fertility diet is high in vegetables, fruit, nuts and seeds. Fish intake is important, particularly omega-3-rich fish such as wild/organic salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring and anchovies. Including more pulses and plant-based foods is helpful and reducing red meat, particularly processed meats, is beneficial. A reduction in high fat, high sugar processed foods is recommended.

Zinc is the most widely studied nutrient in terms of fertility for men. It is an essential component of genetic material and a zinc deficiency can cause chromosome changes, leading to reduced fertility and an increased risk of miscarriage for the female partner. Zinc is found in high concentrations in the sperm and is needed to make the outer layer and tail of the

sperm and is, therefore, essential for the health of sperm. Selenium is an antioxidant that helps to protect your body from highly reactive chemical fragments called free radicals. Good levels of selenium are also essential to maximise sperm formation. Vitamin E is another powerful antioxidant and has been shown to increase fertility when given to men. Vitamin C is also an antioxidant and we know that it is important for men as it can help to increase sperm counts by up to a third. Antioxidants in general have been shown to have a major impact on male fertility.



Dr Marilyn Glenville PhD is the author of 16 internationally bestselling books including *Getting Pregnant Faster*. Visit www.glenvillenutrition.com or phone 01892 515905.

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