



Lila Kirkland ND ANP ART Reg

# Naturopathy & Nutrition

**Lila Kirkland** ND ANP ART Reg qualified as a Naturopath at the Faculté Libres de Médecines Naturelles in Paris in 1995. She continued to study Naturopathy in Germany, acquiring the Heil Praktiker Diploma (European Naturopathy Diploma). She joined the ANP (Association of Naturopathic Practitioners). Lila then qualified in, and became a member of, ART (Advanced Reflexology Techniques). Lila has been working mainly as a Naturopath and Reflexologist for the past 10 years. Lila may be contacted on Tel: 07876 748 341; lila@twickenhamnaturalhealth.co.uk; www.twickenhamnaturalhealth.co.uk

## Nutrition and Fertility

### Can What I Eat Affect My Fertility?

**Should I avoid certain foods? What foods should I eat to improve my fertility?** These are some of the questions I am asked when a couple are trying to conceive a baby. There are many reasons why some couples find it difficult to become pregnant first time or even second time around, and there are many treatments and therapies available to help. However, as a starting point, improving your diet and eating healthily can have a dramatic effect on ones fertility. Certain foods decrease our fertility, therefore it is essential to decrease our intake or cut out these foods completely:

**Cigarettes and Drugs** – These are damaging not only to yourself but to your future baby, and it is therefore important to stop several months before getting pregnant. It is important to prepare your body for pregnancy. This will involve paying a lot of attention to what you consume, because everything you consume will go directly or indirectly to your baby before and during pregnancy. A baby's organs begin to form at around 17 days after conception when most people don't know they are pregnant.  
**Alcohol** – Even in moderation alcohol can have detrimental effects on a woman and a man's fertility.

In women, it causes a hormonal imbalance between the hypothalamus, pituitary and the ovaries, and can result in abnormal development of the uterus lining and can also inhibit ovulation. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause early miscarriage or pre-term birth.

In men, drinking alcohol has a detrimental effect on sperm production because alcohol increases the oestrogen levels, which decreases important sperm-producing hormones such as testosterone. Alcohol is also a toxin which kills off the sperm-producing cells in the testicles. As sperm takes at least 3 months to develop, you should try a semen analysis again after 3-4 months of having cut out alcohol from your diet.

### **Caffeine (coffee, tea, chocolate, cola)**

In recent studies it has been found that women who drank more than 2 cups of coffee a day took longer to conceive than those who had no coffee at all. As coffee has no nutritional value, in fact quite the opposite, it depletes the body of important minerals like calcium, which is essential for the growth of a healthy baby and it would be sensible to reduce or cut out coffee altogether. Coffee, tea, chocolate and cola also contain a substance called methyl-xanthine which disrupts the normal function of the pituitary and hypothalamus glands. It has a drug like-effect, which is why these foods are addictive. If you decide to give up coffee and caffeine, it is likely that you will experience withdrawal effects, such as headaches, sluggishness and mood swings, but these will pass. Be aware of caffeine in other foods such as energy drinks, some soft drinks, iced tea, coffee-flavoured ice-cream and even in decaffeinated coffee. It is also in a variety of over-the-counter drugs, including some headache, cold, and allergy remedies.

### Foods You Should Consider Including In Your Diet

Firstly it is important to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet ensuring you have a good variety of nutritious foods.

### For Women

If you are over-weight you should consider losing weight to reduce the chances of complications during pregnancy such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

A good way to help lose weight, even if just a little, and to increase your fertility, is to start eating healthily. Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, fresh and in season is always best. Your diet should include some protein twice a day, such as chicken, eggs and fish, some carbohydrates such as porridge, rice and brown bread, a little dairy, and a handful of nuts and seeds per day. Eating organic foods wherever possible is also important to minimize the intake of harmful pesticides and other chemicals which clog up our system.

**Iron** – an important mineral in preparing the uterine lining and making blood. Iron is found in red meat, pulses, eggs, and green vegetables such as broccoli and spinach.

**Folic Acid** – a very important vitamin for prevention of spina bifida (a neural-tube defect in babies). You should take 400 mcg of folic acid in a supplement form, starting from when you are trying to conceive until the end of the first trimester of pregnancy. In addition to that, you will find folic acid in foods such

as brown bread, chickpeas, lentils, broccoli, cabbage, spinach, peas and all green leafy vegetables.

**Vitamin C** – found in all citrus fruits, kiwis, strawberries and green vegetables. Vitamin C helps absorb other vitamins and minerals and helps to maintain cellular health.

**Omega 3 and 6 oils** – these are crucial for a woman's hormonal and reproductive system and also for a healthy baby. It is important to take these oils or eat enough of foods containing these good oils before and during pregnancy. Some studies have shown that a lack of these 'good oils' can cause miscarriage. Omega 3 is found in oily fish such as salmon, and omega 6, in nuts and seeds.

Most of the additional needs can be met by eating a good healthy diet. A few points to remember;

- Aim to drink eight glasses of water a day;
- Avoid sugary and fatty foods;
- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables;
- Eat enough protein;
- Wherever possible, eat Organic!

#### For Men

It is equally important for men to get healthy too, before conceiving. A healthy diet, being the right weight, drinking plenty of water and less alcohol are of utmost importance. The following vitamin and minerals are essential for male fertility;

**Vitamin C** – same as above, and also protects sperm from free-radical damage.

**Zinc** – helps increase sperm count. Zinc is found in pumpkin seeds, meat, eggs, seafood, wholegrain cereals and pulses.

(It is important to note that alcohol reduces zinc levels.)

**Selenium** – another nutrient that has a role in male fertility. It is contained in Brazil nuts, meat, cereals, mushrooms and seafood.

**Protein** – Amino acids, in protein, such as L-Carnitine and L-Arginine are key nutrients in healthy sperm formation and motility. It is important to eat some meat, fish and seafood, but for vegetarians, these can be found in a supplement form.

This advice is of course a general guideline and it is always best to seek professional advice from a naturopath/nutritionist for an individualized programme to suit you as an individual or as a couple.