



Female Fertility:

A guide through natural techniques to support female-factor fertility

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Who Am I?

I am Laura Biddle—an Acupuncturist and Herbal Medicine Practitioner based in Sutton Coldfield. I have over a decade of experience and specialise in fertility and hormonal health. I attend regular CPDs to remain up-to-date with fertility and evidence-based medicine, I am a member of the Association of Acupuncture Clinicians (AAC) and the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (RCHM).



Introduction

I am pleased to observe an increasing number of couples seeking fertility treatments in my clinic. Engaging both partners in the treatment process substantially raises the likelihood of success. Worldwide, 1 in 6 couples faces challenges in conceiving, with the causes being evenly distributed between male-factor and female-factor fertility issues. Often, fertility challenges are a shared concern within the couple, and when these issues are accurately diagnosed and managed, we frequently see the joyous outcome of healthy pregnancies. I have been continuously working through advanced fertility courses and reading modern research since 2020.

This guide focuses on the essential aspects of female fertility, examining the factors that can influence it, and suggesting proactive steps to enhance reproductive health.

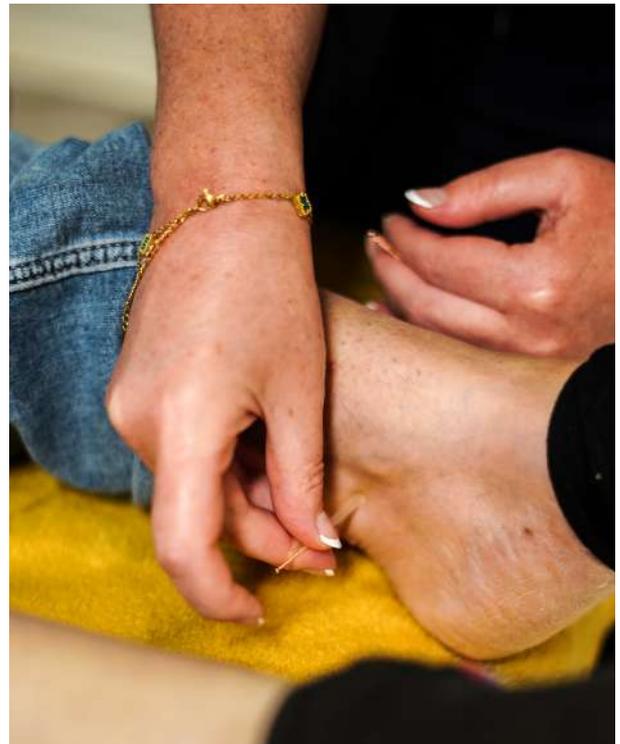
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How can acupuncture help?

Acupuncture has shown to be beneficial in enhancing female fertility through a holistic approach that targets various physiological and emotional aspects. Here's an overview of how acupuncture can support female reproductive health:

- **Hormonal Regulation:** Acupuncture can help regulate the hormonal balance, which is crucial for regular menstrual cycles and ovulation, creating a favourable environment for conception
- **Improved Ovarian Function:** It can enhance ovarian function and possibly improve egg quality, essential factors in increasing fertility
- **Uterine Blood Flow:** By increasing blood flow to the uterus, acupuncture can help improve the uterine lining, making it more receptive to implantation
- **Stress Reduction:** Acupuncture is known for its ability to reduce stress and anxiety, which are known to negatively affect fertility. It helps induce relaxation, lowering cortisol levels, which can improve overall reproductive health
- **Supports IVF Treatments:** There's evidence suggesting that acupuncture could enhance the outcomes of assisted reproductive technologies like in vitro fertilisation (IVF) by improving the uterine environment and reducing stress, which may increase the chances of successful implantation
- **Menstrual Regulation:** Acupuncture can help in regulating menstrual cycles, ensuring regular ovulation, which is pivotal for timing conception efforts
- **Immune Modulation:** It may also influence the immune system, which plays a role in the body's overall health and its ability to maintain a pregnancy

In addition to these physiological benefits, acupuncture provides a calming effect, offering a sanctuary from the stressors of daily life that can impact fertility. By harmonising the body's systems, acupuncture fosters a conducive environment for conception, supporting both natural fertility and assisted reproductive procedures.



How can herbal medicine help?

Herbal medicine offers a spectrum of benefits that enhance female reproductive health, including:

- **Regulating Hormonal Levels:** Herbs play a crucial role in balancing hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone, which are essential for regular menstrual cycles and optimal reproductive health.
- **Enhancing Ovarian Function:** Specific herbs can stimulate ovarian activity, improving the quality and viability of eggs, which is particularly beneficial for women experiencing fertility issues or undergoing fertility treatments.
- **Improving Uterine Health:** Herbs can strengthen uterine health and function, encouraging a thick, healthy uterine lining which is vital for embryo implantation and pregnancy maintenance.
- **Stress Reduction:** Herbal treatments can help reduce stress and anxiety, which are known to negatively impact fertility. By promoting relaxation, these herbs help create a conducive environment for conception.
- **Supporting Thyroid Function:** Since thyroid health is closely linked to reproductive health, herbs that support thyroid function can also enhance fertility.
- **Reducing Inflammation:** Many herbs have anti-inflammatory properties that can improve reproductive health by reducing inflammation in the body, which is known to affect fertility.
- **Improving Blood Flow:** Enhancing blood circulation to reproductive organs ensures that these tissues receive ample nutrients and oxygen, which is crucial for their proper function.

The impact of these herbal remedies can significantly improve female fertility by addressing underlying health issues and creating a balanced body environment conducive to conception. Each herbal prescription is tailored to the individual's unique health needs, ensuring optimal care and effectiveness.



Understanding your menstrual cycle

Your menstrual cycle is an important indicator of your overall health and fertility. Understanding, knowing, and tracking it are fundamental steps to optimising your fertility and recognising potential issues early on.

What a Healthy Menstrual Cycle Looks Like

Every menstrual cycle is unique, just like every person. What's normal for one individual may not be for another. However, there are general parameters that a healthy cycle should fit within to be considered optimal for fertility:

Menstrual Cycle Length: The length of your cycle (from the first day of your period to the first day of the next) can range from 24 to 36 days. The average is 28 days, but this isn't a one-size-fits-all number. Variations from month to month are also common.

Follicular Phase: This phase starts on the first day of your period and lasts until ovulation. During this time, a follicle matures an egg ready for release. It typically lasts between 10 and 20 days.

Ovulation: Ovulation occurs once the follicle is ready and the egg is mature. It can happen anywhere from day 10 to day 20—don't assume it always occurs on day 14. There should be noticeable cervical mucus for 2 to 7 days before ovulation. This mucus is your best indicator of fertility.

Luteal Phase: This phase runs from ovulation until your next period. If an embryo forms, implantation occurs, and hormone levels rise. If conception doesn't happen, hormone levels fall, and your period begins. This phase should be between 12 and 16 days.

Period: A healthy period lasts between 3 and 7 days, with minimal pain that responds well to painkillers if needed. There should be no spotting, the blood should be bright red with minimal clots, and the flow should be consistent.

What to Look Out For and Investigate Further

- **Pain:** Severe pain that doesn't respond to painkillers or prevents you from going about your daily life.
- **Irregularity:** Cycles shorter than 23 days or longer than 36 days may indicate issues with ovulation.
- **No Cervical Mucus:** Or mucus that is itchy or has an unusual smell.
- **Too Heavy:** If you are flooding sanitary products, needing to double up, or changing every 1 to 2 hours.
- **Too Light:** Periods lasting less than 2 days.

Why Tracking Your Cycle is So Helpful

Keeping a record of your cycle can help you identify any problems and give you useful information for a proper assessment by your GP. You could use an app or simply jot down notes in a diary. If you have any concerns about your cycle, do seek advice either from your GP or from a fertility experienced Acupuncturist. Tracking empowers you to understand your body better and take charge of your fertility journey.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and Thyroid Disorders

Let's shed light on Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and thyroid disorders, offering insights into their diagnosis and management. Both conditions are influenced by the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Ovarian (HPO) and Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Thyroid (HPT) axes, which play critical roles in hormonal balance affecting PCOS and thyroid health.

Understanding PCOS

PCOS is diagnosed when two of the following three criteria are met:

- **Androgen Excess:** Signs include hirsutism (male-pattern hair growth), acne, and other related symptoms.
- **Irregular Menstrual Cycles:** These may be longer than 34 days, or marked by excessive bleeding or pain.
- **Polycystic Ovaries:** Visible on ultrasound scans.

How PCOS Affects Fertility

PCOS itself is not a direct cause of infertility but can complicate conception due to:

- **Irregular Ovulation:** The timing of ovulation can be unpredictable.
- **Egg Quality:** Eggs may take longer to mature, potentially reducing their quality.
- **Uterine Lining:** The endometrial lining may thicken abnormally due to prolonged menstrual cycles.

Distinguishing PCOS from Other Conditions

It's crucial to differentiate PCOS from other issues, with a reliable diagnosis combining blood tests, symptom assessment, and ultrasound. It's also vital to rule out thyroid disorders when considering a diagnosis of PCOS.

Understanding Thyroid Disorders

Thyroid disorders involve imbalances in thyroid hormone levels or the presence of autoimmune conditions targeting the thyroid.

Common Symptoms of Hypothyroidism

- **Menstrual Issues:** Painful, irregular cycles or early menopause onset.
- **Reproductive Challenges:** Difficulties in conception or maintaining pregnancy.
- **Metabolic Symptoms:** Weight gain, cold sensitivity, and energy depletion.
- **Mood Fluctuations:** Depression and anxiety.

Common Symptoms of Hyperthyroidism

- **Mood and Energy Levels:** Nervousness, mood swings, and fatigue.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Heat sensitivity, muscle weakness, and gastrointestinal upset.
- **Reproductive Signs:** Decreased libido and menstrual irregularities.

How Thyroid Conditions Impact Fertility

Both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can disrupt regular menstrual cycles, complicating the timing of ovulation and increasing the risk of miscarriage.

Supporting Your Health

Lifestyle adjustments can significantly alleviate symptoms of PCOS and thyroid disorders:

- **Nutrition:** Embrace a balanced diet rich in diverse vegetables, fruits, proteins, and carbohydrates. Consider consulting with a nutritionist who specialises in reproductive health.
- **Exercise:** Tailor your activity levels to your condition; yoga can be particularly beneficial.
- **Diagnostic Testing:** Ensure accurate diagnosis and effective management by undergoing appropriate tests. A Fertility Support Trained practitioner can guide you in understanding test results and may refer you for further assessments if needed.

Understanding Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a common yet frequently undiagnosed condition affecting an estimated 1 in 10 women, and it could be a significant factor if you're struggling to conceive. If you experience symptoms such as short menstrual cycles, spotting between periods, heavy or painful periods, discomfort during sexual intercourse, irregular bowel habits, or unexplained infertility, endometriosis may be the underlying cause. These symptoms vary widely among individuals, and not everyone will experience all of them.

Diagnosing Endometriosis

The only definitive ways to diagnose endometriosis are through a laparoscopy or an MRI. These procedures help confirm the presence of endometrial cells outside of the uterus, which react to hormonal changes just like the cells inside the uterus, leading to pain and inflammation during the menstrual cycle.

What Causes Endometriosis?

The condition is primarily driven by oestrogen, which regulates uterine tissue growth. Excess oestrogen can lead to increased pain and inflammation. The condition might originate from a genetic or epigenetic anomaly in cells that mimic those lining the uterus but are located elsewhere in the body. These cells can develop into endometriosis if not naturally eliminated by the body due to an impaired immune system.

Living with Endometriosis

Managing endometriosis often involves integrating regular acupuncture sessions, which many find helpful in managing pain and other symptoms. Herbal medicine can also play a role in balancing hormones and modulating the immune system. Lifestyle changes can significantly impact the management of endometriosis:

- Consult a nutritionist to discuss supplements that help remove excess oestrogen, such as vitamin D, omega oils, and glutathione.
- Reduce exposure to oestrogen disruptors like BPA and avoid dietary soy.
- Incorporate a diet rich in antioxidants to fight inflammation and enhance egg quality.
- Seek advice on immune-modulating supplements and gut health from a functional medicine practitioner or nutritionist.

Painful Conception Efforts

It's not uncommon for those with endometriosis to experience pain during sexual activities, which can complicate efforts to conceive. Tools like the Oh Nut (www.ohnut.co) are recommended to reduce discomfort during intercourse, aiding those trying to conceive despite endometriosis.

If you're experiencing any troubling symptoms, or if trying to conceive has been a challenge, exploring the possibility of endometriosis with a healthcare provider could provide crucial answers and guidance.

Understanding AMH: Anti-Müllerian Hormone Levels

Receiving a report of low Anti-Müllerian Hormone (AMH) levels can be distressing, especially when undergoing fertility assessments. However, it's crucial to understand what AMH levels indicate and their limitations:

- **Natural Fertility Insight:** AMH provides limited information about your natural fertility or chances of conceiving naturally.
- **Egg Quality Assessment:** While AMH can give an idea about the quantity of eggs, it does not directly speak to the quality of those eggs, which is more closely related to age.
- **IVF Preparation:** IVF clinics may use AMH to estimate the potential number of follicles available for egg collection.
- **IVF Protocol Guidance:** AMH levels can help determine the most suitable IVF protocol and the level of hormonal stimulation required.

What to Do If You Have Low AMH?

If you find out your AMH levels are low, here are proactive steps you can take:

- **Don't Panic:** Begin by understanding your overall reproductive health to identify any underlying issues that could be influencing your AMH levels.
- **Investigate Ovarian Environment Factors:** Factors that might affect your ovarian environment include:
 - Vitamin D deficiency
 - Anaemia or low ferritin levels
 - Inflammation or autoimmune conditions
 - Poor circulation or pelvic issues
 - Lifestyle factors such as smoking or inadequate sleep
- **Check Hormonal Levels:** Investigate your menstrual cycle hormones:
 - FSH, LH, and oestrogen: Test these early in your menstrual cycle for accurate assessment.
 - DHEA-S and testosterone: These can influence ovarian function and impact AMH levels.
- **Thorough Thyroid Examination:** Ensure a comprehensive thyroid function test, including thyroid antibodies, to detect any underlying issues like autoimmune thyroiditis, which could predispose you to premature ovarian insufficiency.
- **Specialised Ultrasound:** Schedule an ultrasound with a specialist in women's gynaecological health to check the condition of your ovaries and rule out other reproductive issues.

- **Explore Male Fertility:** Since a woman's fertility isn't the only factor, consider thorough testing for male fertility, including a DNA fragmentation test, to rule out male factor fertility issues.

Understanding AMH in context and taking comprehensive steps to investigate and address potential health issues can empower you on your fertility journey. Remember, a single hormone level does not define your fertility.

Understanding the Role of the Immune System in Female Fertility

The immune system plays a pivotal role in successful pregnancy outcomes, from the implantation stages right through to childbirth. It's essential for the immune system to accept the foetus as part of the body rather than rejecting it as a foreign object. Issues in this acceptance process can lead to challenges such as recurrent miscarriages or unexplained infertility.

However, it's important to remember that not all fertility issues are due to immune problems. Factors such as chromosomal abnormalities, poor egg or sperm quality, and uterine conditions also play significant roles. If you've experienced repeated miscarriages or unsuccessful IVF cycles, especially with high-quality blastocysts, and other common issues have been ruled out, considering potential immune system complications might be a valuable step.

Common Autoimmune Conditions Affecting Fertility

One prevalent immune issue in fertility contexts is the presence of autoimmune antibodies, where the body forms defenses against its own cells, mistaking them as threats:

- **ANA (Anti-nuclear Antibodies):** These antibodies target the DNA of the developing baby. Presence of ANA is linked with lower pregnancy rates and higher miscarriage rates post IVF/ICSI treatments. These antibodies can exist without symptoms, making them crucial to test for if recurrent losses are a concern.
- **APS (Anti-phospholipid Antibodies):** These antibodies increase blood clotting, which can interfere with implantation and early pregnancy sustenance, often leading to early miscarriages. They may also cause late losses and other complications such as fetal growth retardation.
- **ATA (Anti-thyroid Antibodies):** Often indicative of Hashimoto's Disease, these antibodies attack the thyroid and can be present even if thyroid function tests return normal. Their presence is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage, especially in the early stages.

- NK Cells (Natural Killer Cells): While crucial for fighting off cancers and other diseases by secreting tumour necrosis factors, overly active NK cells can mistakenly attack the embryo. This can occur when their activation levels are high, posing a challenge during pregnancy.

Controversy in Testing and Treatment

The field of reproductive immunology is dynamic, with new studies frequently altering the landscape. The effectiveness and relevance of NK cell level assessments in influencing pregnancy outcomes are still debated. Some clinics report high success rates using immune-modulating protocols, while others remain sceptical due to inconsistent research findings.

Indicators for Immune Testing

Certain factors may suggest a higher risk of immune-related fertility issues:

Multiple IVF failures or miscarriages, particularly at a younger age.

A personal or family history of autoimmune diseases.

Unexplained infertility extending over several years.

Experiences of specific pregnancy complications such as pre-eclampsia or foetal growth retardation.

Seeking Testing and Treatment

Testing for immune factors can be pursued through NHS services after recurrent losses or through private fertility clinics, particularly for NK cell assessments. Treatment options vary, ranging from low-dose aspirin and heparin to more specific interventions like IVIg or intralipids, depending on individual cases and underlying conditions.

This comprehensive approach to understanding and managing the immune aspects of fertility underscores the importance of a well-rounded investigation into each unique case, ensuring that all potential factors are considered to enhance the likelihood of a successful pregnancy.

The UK's 10 most common tests, how they're taken and what they're checking for.

Blood Tests for Hormone Levels - These tests measure levels of hormones like follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinising hormone (LH), prolactin, oestrogen, and progesterone through a simple blood draw. They assess ovarian reserve, ovulation status, and other hormonal functions affecting fertility.

STD Test - A swab or urine test that checks for sexually transmitted infections, which can impact fertility if untreated.

Ultrasound Scan - This test uses high-frequency sound waves to create images of the internal organs. Transvaginal ultrasound assesses the health of the uterus and ovaries, and checks for blockages in the fallopian tubes.

Hysterosalpingography (HSG) - An X-ray test that involves injecting a dye into the fallopian tubes to check for blockages that could prevent an egg from being fertilised or reaching the uterus.

Hysterosalpingo-Contrast Sonography (HyCoSy) - Similar to HSG but uses ultrasound instead of X-rays to observe the dye passing through the uterus and fallopian tubes, assessing for blockages.

Laparoscopy - A surgical procedure where a camera is inserted into the pelvis via a small incision to look directly at the pelvic organs and check for conditions like endometriosis or pelvic adhesions that could affect fertility.

Hysteroscopy - A procedure to inspect the inside of the uterus using a small camera passed through the cervix. It's used to identify uterine abnormalities, such as fibroids or polyps, which can impact fertility.

Thyroid Function Tests - These measure thyroid hormone levels in the blood, including T3, T4, and thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), because both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism can affect fertility.

Prolactin Levels - Elevated prolactin can interfere with ovulation, making this test important for women who have irregular menstrual cycles or difficulty conceiving.

Anti-Müllerian Hormone (AMH) Testing - This blood test helps assess a woman's ovarian reserve or the number of remaining eggs, indicating her potential fertility lifespan.

IVF: The Basics

IVF (In Vitro Fertilisation) offers various treatment options to cater to different medical needs and preferences. Here's an overview of these options, including types of cycles, medication protocols, and embryo transfer choices:

- Types of IVF Cycles:
 - Medicated Cycles: These cycles use medications to stimulate the ovaries to produce multiple eggs. The common protocol includes administering hormones like FSH and LH to promote follicular development.
 - Natural Cycles: In natural IVF cycles, no drugs are used to stimulate the ovaries. Instead, the cycle relies on the natural growth of the single egg that develops during a woman's normal menstrual cycle.
 - Mild Stimulation IVF: This approach uses lower doses of fertility drugs to stimulate the ovaries, aiming to collect fewer but higher quality eggs.
- Types of Medications:
 - Gonadotropins: These are fertility hormones (FSH and LH) that stimulate the ovaries to produce multiple eggs.
 - GnRH Agonists and Antagonists: These medications control the body's production of hormones to prevent premature ovulation during IVF cycles.
 - Progesterone Supplements: Used after egg retrieval to prepare the lining of the uterus for implantation.
- Embryo Transfer Options:
 - Fresh Embryo Transfer: Involves transferring embryos to the uterus a few days after fertilisation.
 - Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET): Embryos are frozen and stored for future use. FET cycles can be more flexible and have high success rates similar to fresh transfers.
- Classes of Embryos:
 - Embryos are graded based on their development stage and quality, which can include factors like the number of cells, symmetry of cells, and degree of fragmentation.
 - Blastocyst Transfer: Transferring embryos that have developed for five to six days and reached the blastocyst stage, which may improve the chances of implantation.

Each of these options has its advantages and considerations. For example, natural and mild stimulation cycles reduce the risk of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) and are generally easier on the body, but they may yield fewer eggs, which could impact the number of embryos available for transfer. Medicated cycles, while more aggressive, can increase the number of eggs retrieved, which is beneficial for patients with lower ovarian reserves or those looking to freeze additional embryos for future use.

Egg: Fertility Guide

The choice of a fresh or frozen embryo transfer often depends on individual medical circumstances, the preference of the fertility clinic, and the quality/timing of embryo development.

When considering IVF treatment, it's essential to discuss these options thoroughly with a fertility specialist to determine the best approach based on individual fertility profiles and personal preferences.

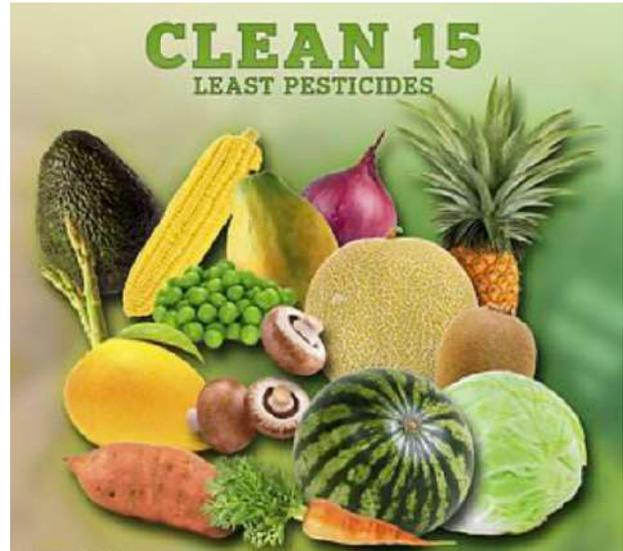
What can YOU do to help yourself?

Diet and Nutrition

Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial when trying to conceive. While no diet can guarantee improved fertility, certain nutrients and foods are known to support reproductive health. For tailored advice that suits your specific dietary needs, consider consulting a professional fertility nutritionist who can provide a detailed analysis of your diet. In the meantime, here's a list of beneficial foods that are generally recognised to enhance fertility:

- **Leafy Greens:** Spinach, kale, and Swiss chard are rich in folate, a vital nutrient that helps prevent neural tube defects and may improve ovulation.
- **Berries:** Strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries are high in antioxidants, which can help protect eggs from damage and ageing.
- **Fatty Fish:** Salmon, mackerel, and sardines are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for hormone balance and fetal brain development.
- **Nuts and Seeds:** Flaxseeds, walnuts, and almonds provide healthy fats and vitamin E, which are crucial for maintaining cell health and hormonal balance.
- **Whole Grains:** Quinoa, brown rice, and whole wheat contain complex carbohydrates that help regulate menstrual cycles and improve fertility.
- **Lean Proteins:** Chicken, turkey, and legumes like lentils and chickpeas are important for cell growth and hormonal function.
- **Dairy*:** Full-fat dairy products like milk and yoghurt are beneficial for reproductive health, potentially reducing the risk of ovulatory infertility. *TCM practitioners may advise against consuming dairy for some people.
- **Iron-Rich Foods:** Beans, tofu, and red meat can prevent anaemia, improving ovulatory function and offering better reproductive health.
- **High-Fibre Foods:** Vegetables, fruits, and beans help to regulate blood sugar and insulin levels, which is important for hormonal balance.
- **Vitamin C-Rich Foods:** Oranges, kiwis, and bell peppers enhance the immune system and increase iron absorption, supporting overall fertility health.

The Clean 15: The fruits and vegetables with the least pesticide residues



Foods to Limit or Avoid

- **Processed Meat:** High consumption of processed meats like ham, bacon, and sausages has been linked to ovulatory infertility. The additives and preservatives in processed meats can impact hormonal balance and reproductive health.
- **Soy Products:** Excessive intake of soy products can lead to elevated levels of phytoestrogens, which mimic oestrogen in the body. High levels of phytoestrogens can disrupt the hormonal balance crucial for regular ovulation.
- **High-Mercury Fish:** Certain types of fish that are high in mercury, such as swordfish and king mackerel, should be avoided as mercury can negatively impact fertility and harm fetal development.
- **Unpasteurised Dairy and Cheeses:** Consuming unpasteurised dairy products can pose a risk of bacterial infections like listeriosis, which can be harmful to both maternal health and pregnancy outcomes.
- **Refined Sugars and High-Glycemic Foods:** Foods high in refined sugars and those with a high glycemic index can cause spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels, which can lead to hormonal imbalances and affect ovulatory function.
- **Excessive Caffeine:** High levels of caffeine intake have been linked to an increased risk of fertility issues. It is generally recommended to limit caffeine intake to less than 200 mg per day - about one 12-ounce cup of coffee.
- **Alcohol:** Alcohol consumption can negatively affect fertility. It is advisable to reduce or eliminate alcohol when trying to conceive, as it can impact ovulation and early fetal development.
- **Trans Fats:** Often found in fried foods, baked goods, and processed snack foods, trans fats can increase the risk of ovulatory infertility and negatively affect overall health.
- **Artificial Sweeteners:** Some studies suggest that artificial sweeteners, like those found in diet sodas and sugar-free products, could affect fertility, although evidence is mixed. Natural alternatives like honey or maple syrup in moderation might be better options.

Egg: Fertility Guide

- **Non-Organic Fruits and Vegetables:** Pesticide residues on non-organic produce can affect oestrogen and other reproductive hormones. Opting for organic where possible or thoroughly washing produce can help reduce exposure.

The Dirty Dousen: The fruits and vegetables with the most pesticide residues



Suggested lifestyle improvements

Alcohol: Alcohol consumption can negatively impact female reproductive health, much like its effects in men. It's linked to hormonal imbalances and can reduce the likelihood of successful conception. For women aiming to optimise their fertility, it's recommended to keep alcohol intake to a minimum—ideally no more than five (5) units per month. This moderate level helps minimise any potential adverse effects on fertility.

Moderate Caffeine Intake: Excessive caffeine consumption may contribute to fertility issues. It's advisable to reduce your intake to improve your reproductive health.

Quit Smoking: Smoking has detrimental effects similar to alcohol on fertility. Ceasing smoking can significantly enhance your fertility prospects.

Manage Medication Use: Where possible, reduce the use of recreational and prescription drugs. Depending on the substance, these can have various side effects that may negatively impact your overall health and fertility. Any changes to prescription medicine must be discussed with and managed by your GP.

Exercise and Sports

Finding the right balance in physical activity is essential for supporting female fertility and overall health. Engaging in moderate, consistent exercise can help maintain a healthy body weight, which is crucial for reproductive health. Obesity has been linked to hormonal imbalances that can affect fertility. Exercise also enhances blood flow, which benefits the ovaries and improves the health of the reproductive system.

Physical activity is also a great stress reliever and can improve mental well-being. This is particularly beneficial as stress can negatively impact hormonal balance and fertility. It's important, however, to avoid excessive exercise as it can lead to overheating and hormonal disruptions. For example, excessive high-intensity training might lead to an imbalance in stress hormones like cortisol, which can affect fertility.

Activities like yoga and regular walks are recommended as they are gentle yet effective at maintaining fitness without the risks associated with high-intensity or high-impact workouts.

Always ensure you stay hydrated, wear appropriate clothing, and avoid exercising in extremely hot conditions to protect your reproductive health.

Exposure to Endocrine Disruptors

The endocrine system is essential in regulating hormone production and maintaining hormonal balance, which is crucial for female reproductive health. Exposure to certain chemicals found in plastics, pesticides, skincare, and cleaning products can disrupt this delicate balance, potentially affecting fertility.

Reducing Exposure to Endocrine Disruptors:

- **Natural Cleaning Products:** Opt for eco-friendly and biodegradable cleaning products that are free from harsh chemicals to reduce your exposure to potential endocrine disruptors. This supports both a clean environment and fertility health.
- **Natural Cosmetics:** Using cosmetics made from organic or plant-based materials and free from synthetic fragrances and parabens helps maintain hormonal balance and reduces the risk of fertility issues.
- **BPA-Free Containers:** Avoid containers with Bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical linked to adverse effects on ovarian function, egg quality, and overall fertility. Use alternatives made from glass, stainless steel, or certified BPA-free materials.
- **Filtered Tap Water:** Considering the potential contaminants in tap water, using a water filter can lessen exposure to harmful chemicals.

Significant Endocrine Disruptors:

- **Phytoestrogens:** These naturally occurring compounds, found in certain plants, mimic oestrogen and can bind to oestrogen receptors in the body, potentially disrupting hormonal balance and affecting fertility.
- **Oestrogens:** While essential for various physiological functions in both sexes, an imbalance in oestrogen levels can negatively impact fertility.
- **Other Concerns:** Chemicals such as BPA, phthalates (used in plastics and personal care products), and pesticides can interfere with hormonal functions and should be avoided to maintain reproductive health.



Workplace Factors Affecting Your Fertility

Occupational health factors significantly influence female fertility, as various work conditions and exposures can impact reproductive wellness.

Exposure to Chemicals and Toxins: Many work environments expose employees to harmful substances such as chemicals, heavy metals, pesticides, and solvents. These toxins can negatively affect hormonal balance and reproductive health.

Heat Exposure: Jobs that require prolonged exposure to high temperatures, such as those in industrial kitchens, foundries, and agricultural settings, can increase body temperature. For women, elevated body temperatures can disrupt menstrual cycles and impair egg quality.

Radiation Exposure: Women working in fields that involve radiation, such as healthcare and industrial radiography, may be exposed to ionizing radiation. This exposure can lead to chromosomal damage in eggs and affect fertility.

Shift Work and Sleep Disruption: Shift work, especially night shifts, can disrupt the body's circadian rhythms, leading to hormonal imbalances that can adversely affect menstrual cycles and fertility.

Physical Strain and Stress: Physically demanding jobs that involve heavy lifting or prolonged standing can contribute to chronic stress and fatigue, which may interfere with hormonal regulation and fertility.

Psychological Stress: High-stress work environments can lead to psychological stress, which can impact hormonal balance and consequently, reproductive function.

Sedentary Jobs: Sedentary work can impede blood circulation, including flow to reproductive organs. Poor circulation can lead to reproductive health issues, including decreased ovarian function.

Understanding these occupational risks is crucial for women who are planning pregnancy or experiencing fertility issues. Taking steps to mitigate these risks, such as using protective equipment, managing stress, and seeking regular medical check-ups, can help in maintaining reproductive health.

Warm Feet = Warm Womb

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), keeping your feet warm is closely tied to improving uterine health, crucial for fertility. The belief is that cold feet may lead to a cold uterus, which can be unfavourable for conception. The warmth from the feet is seen to help energise the kidneys—which are linked to reproductive health—thereby promoting a warm, nourishing environment in the uterus. This is thought to enhance blood flow and the condition of the uterine lining, making it more receptive to an embryo. Simple practices like wearing socks, avoiding cold floors, and using warm foot baths are recommended to maintain this vital warmth.

Managing Stress

Stress is a significant factor that can adversely affect fertility, impacting both men and women. For those trying to conceive, managing stress is crucial as prolonged or chronic stress can lead to reduced fertility.

Identifying and Managing Stress:

- **Identify the Source of Stress:** Understand what triggers your stress to manage it effectively. Knowing the root causes helps in addressing them directly.
- **Reduce Exposure to Stress:** Minimise your involvement in stressful situations where possible. Prioritise your well-being and feel empowered to say no to preserve your health.
- **Practice Self-Compassion:** Treat yourself kindly, especially during challenging times. Recognising the impact of stress and responding with kindness is crucial for your mental health.
- **Maintain a Healthy Weight*:** Both underweight and overweight conditions can negatively affect fertility. A balanced weight supports reproductive health. Avoid carrying mobile phones in your pocket to minimise potential risks. *If you are under or overweight, we can adjust your treatments to suit your body as it is or work to support a weight adjustment if you wish. There are some interesting resources for fat-positive fertility on: [Nicola Salmon - Fat Positive & Feminist Fertility Coach - Nicola Salmon](#)
- **Effective Time Management:** Utilise organisational tools like to-do lists and calendars to manage your tasks effectively and alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed.
- **Physical Activity:** Activities such as yoga or general exercise help release physical tension and improve mental well-being, enhancing the mind-body connection.
- **Connect with Nature:** The therapeutic effects of being outdoors are beneficial. Engage in activities like walking, gardening, or simply relaxing in natural surroundings to reduce stress.
- **Regular Sleep Routine:** Aim for about 8 hours of quality sleep each night to ensure your body functions optimally, supporting overall health and fertility.

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- **Acupuncture:** This traditional therapy can balance hormones, enhance blood flow, reduce stress, improve sleep, and decrease inflammation, contributing significantly to improved fertility.
- **Herbal Medicine:** Incorporating herbal medicine can support stress management and overall reproductive health. Tailored herbal treatments can regulate stress hormones and enhance adrenal function, complementing your fertility strategy.

Your Holistic Well-being

Communication and Support: Open and honest communication with your partner about your feelings, fears, and desires is crucial. It can significantly reduce stress and strengthen your bond. Consider joining support groups or seeking counselling to navigate the emotional complexities of fertility challenges together.

Adequate Sleep: Never underestimate the power of good sleep. Sleep deprivation can disrupt hormonal balance and adversely affect fertility. Ensure you're getting sufficient rest to support your body's health.

Hydration: Keeping hydrated is essential for overall health. A simple way to ensure you're drinking enough is to aim for 4% of your body weight in fluids each day. To calculate your daily fluid needs, multiply your weight in kilograms by 0.04. Then, divide this figure by the number of hours you're awake to break it down into manageable amounts.

Making Love, Not Just a Baby: Focus on the joy of intimacy rather than the pressure of conception. Enjoying the act of making love can relieve performance anxiety and deepen your connection with your partner. This approach not only makes the process of trying for a baby less stressful but also helps maintain a loving and intimate relationship. Encourage activities that build emotional closeness and bonding, which are just as important as the physical aspect of your relationship. Sperm can survive 2-5 days inside the female reproductive tract, so aim to have intercourse every 1-2 days during the week before your ovulation date, if you're trying to conceive naturally.

These strategies are designed to support both your physical and emotional well-being, enhancing your journey towards successful parenthood.

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Whether we embark on your fertility journey together or not, I wish you the very best on your path to parenthood. I hope you find this guide useful. All the information presented here is evidence-based and is recommended to all my female fertility patients. Research indicates that with regular weekly acupuncture treatments and professionally prescribed herbal medicines, your chances of conceiving and carrying a baby to full term can more than double. If you have concerns about your fertility, this approach is a proven and safe strategy, suitable for natural conception as well as alongside IVF protocols.

Questions?

If you have any questions regarding anything in this article, don't hesitate to get in touch with me by email: LauraTheAcupuncturist@gmail.com

If you feel ready to schedule an initial consultation with me, please feel free to book in at your convenience using the online booking system.