

ISSUE 3 - 2009

A Natural Approach to Preconception and Assisted Fertility

Some couples can take just months before conceiving naturally, while others require additional time and assistance. For those undergoing assisted fertility and IVF, natural medicines are highly beneficial and completely safe. In fact, integrative support during the process of assisted fertility is important. Ideally, this begins months before the cycle of fertility treatment starts, preparing the body for the prospect of pregnancy. In a number of cases, where patients do not have an identifiable cause for their infertility and are committed to making significant changes, a natural conception may even be achieved.

To begin with, it is important to address overall health, in conjunction with specific factors that may affect fertility. There are a number of health and lifestyle factors that will impact upon fertility, including levels of stress, quality of diet, regularity of exercise, alcohol consumption, known hormone imbalances, and other diagnosed conditions, such as diabetes. More information on general principles for preconception care can be found on our website: www.healthwiseclinic.com.au/page/conditions.

Some treatment recommendations may not be appropriate during certain points of a fertility treatment cycle. So, it is vitally important that you keep your practitioner informed as to what you're taking and at what stage of a cycle you're in, so that any treatment can be tailored appropriately – giving you the best possible support on your path to conception. Likewise, keeping your medical specialist informed of your natural medicine treatment is also important.

Herbal medicine is wonderfully effective in fertility support, influencing the reproductive cycle itself, as well as enhancing overall health. Herbs can affect fertility by balancing the menstrual cycle, regulating hormone production and function, reducing stagnation, improving sleep, and reducing inflammation, pain and discomfort.



For those undergoing assisted fertility and IVF, we may suggest different herbs for different parts of a cycle. For example, leading up to an embryo transfer, we will prescribe herbs promoting fertility, optimal hormone function and nervous system support; whereas following transfer, we will prescribe herbs supporting immune function and those that provide a tonifying, or supportive, action on the body.

SUPPORTING HORMONAL BALANCE

An excess, or deficiency, of hormones can wreak havoc on a menstrual cycle and interfere with fertility. Excessive oestrogen, for example, may diminish chances of successful pregnancy. Certain herbs can help to balance sex hormones and improve the likelihood of conception. These can be used as a starting point for preconception care, or in conjunction with assisted fertility treatment.

Tribulus is a herb often used for the treatment of infertility, impotence and menopause. It has properties that mimic the actions of sex hormones in the body, both in men and women. The herb can also boost sex drive – an important component of fertility!

Black cohosh is a herb that has modulating effect on oestrogen in the body, particularly useful in cases of hormone imbalance and oestrogen insufficiency. This can be useful for stabilising menstrual disorders such as PCOS.

Chaste tree is another hormone modulating herb, commonly used to correct irregular menstrual cycles and erratic ovulation. It is sometimes used to support early pregnancy in women prone to miscarriage.

UTERINE TONICS

Uterine tonics have a balancing effect on the uterus, assisting in normal function. Dong Quai is one such important herb, which increases tone and activity of the uterus itself. It has a normalising effect on the reproductive system, can help to reduce inflammation and improve the overall circulation of blood. For this reason, it can also be referred to as a blood tonic, being used in cases of fatigue, pallor and delayed periods. Although not recommended for use in pregnancy, it is often prescribed during the follicular phase (first half) of a cycle, when preparing to conceive.

In cases of threatened miscarriage (where there is a history or if spotting occurs) herbs such as Chaste Tree, Black Haw, Wild Yam and False Unicorn Root have a history of use and may be appropriate.

NERVOUS SYSTEM SUPPORT

Stress plays a major role in all disease and health processes, including fertility. Stress is the most common side effect of infertility, and it can have very real physiological ramifications. Nervous support is therefore essential for preconception and during the IVF process.

In order to improve the overall adaptation response, tonic herbs such as Siberian Ginseng and Withania may be recommended. Siberian Ginseng is a well known energy and immune tonic, often used for stress-related symptoms and during periods of convalescence. Withania is another wonderful stress reliever and energy tonic; it promotes optimal blood flow and is used traditionally to maintain health in pregnant women.

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Thankyou for your referrals

This practice grows because you care enough about your family and friends to refer them to us for their health needs and assistance. Our commitment to you is to provide the highest quality and most genuine care that we can give. So to all of you have sent people to our clinic – thankyou!

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Top 3 health essentials

To promote both ageing well and healing, it is essential that these three major health promoting areas are in order:

Diet and nutrition: every cell (and therefore function such as immunity or thinking) in our body is dependent on the food that we eat which in turn contributes to our overall well being. Not only is the food that we eat important but so too is our ability to digest (process) the food. Ideally, the diet should be as unprocessed and natural as is possible emphasizing fresh fruit and vegetables, legumes and grains. If you would like a copy of our healthy eating diet please ask at your next appointment or visit www.healthwiseclinic.com.au and click on the treatments page. If your digestion needs improving then all our practitioners are able to help with this.

Exercise: we live in a very sedentary age and to compensate for this we have to work our muscles daily. The minimum level of exercise should be 30 minutes per day. This may include walking, gym or gardening. Our grandparents, even with sedentary jobs, had the equivalent of three hours exercise a day, as transport included more cycling and walking; and household activities such as cleaning and clothes washing were more manual.

Sleep: ideally we need about 8 hours sleep a night for optimum performance - less than 5 hours is not enough. Sleep is where our mind resolves the stresses of the day, where our immune system builds, and our adrenal glands replenish. There are many strategies to help with sleep, including herbal remedies, meditation and stress management. Speak to us about your sleep if you feel it is not adequate.



"Today is the youth of your old age, and what you do today affects an outcome thirty or forty years from now."

Deepak Chopra,
M.D.

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Adrenal tonics such as Rehmannia and Licorice are also useful for individuals who have been under chronic stress or find themselves suffering from anxiety. These help the body to better use the stress hormone cortisol, which impacts upon sex hormone function, when out of balance.

IMMUNE SYSTEM SUPPORT

Supporting immunity is an important aspect of fertility, as consistently good health in a prospective mother will have positive effects upon her child. Immune dysfunction and certain auto-immune conditions can also impair fertility, increasing the challenge to conceive. Reducing inflammation is another important consideration, particularly of the uterine tissue. Inflammatory mediators such as cytokines and prostaglandins may reduce the receptivity of the uterus to the fertilised embryo. By reducing these inflammatory mediators we can increase uterine receptivity

Echinacea is an excellent herb for modulating and improving function of the immune system. It has a long history of use in conditions of repeated infection, illness and inflammation and can be taken regularly to improve overall health.

LIVER TONICS

The liver plays an important role in clearing waste products from the body, as well as regulating the activity of circulating hormones. Herbs that enhance the liver's function can aid the correct clearance of hormones and improve general detoxification - particularly for people with a history of excess, or with signs of poor elimination.

Bupleurum is used for supporting liver function and reducing inflammation; it does not have the strong 'detoxifying' effects that some other liver herbs do,

but a more gentle regulating effect. It is often used for menstrual disorders associated with stress and worry.

PHYTO-OESTROGENS

Phyto-oestrogens are compounds found in some plants and foods - they are not actual hormones, but mimic the activity of oestrogen within the body. They can modulate (or balance) the activity of sex hormones such as oestrogen, and hormones with which it interacts. This is useful in conditions that are influenced by an excessive production of oestrogen in the body, such as endometriosis, fibroids, period pain, PMS, infertility and some cancers. Phyto-oestrogenic herbs include Paeonia and Red Clover.

FINALLY

To discern what is most appropriate, it is important to discuss your situation with a qualified practitioner before going ahead with any herbal therapy. It is also important to avoid self-prescribing, as the quality and selection of non-practitioner products is not recommended. Over time, and as your circumstances change, treatments will often be adjusted.

Preparing the body for conception is just the first step, however, as ongoing support throughout pregnancy and following birth allows for the healthiest - and easiest - experience overall.

Lastly, while there is often a strong focus on optimising female fertility, preconception care for both partners is ideal - enhancing the health of parents and baby. Involving both partners in the preparation for pregnancy and birth also creates a wonderful pattern for equal involvement in the new life being created.

Herbal repeats? – Phone first!

If you need a repeat for a herbal formula please phone us first. Some of your formulae are very complicated and take time to make up. Advising us in advance may save you waiting up to 20 minutes.

Did You Know?

It's easy to establish a routine of 30 minutes of exercise each day, with these 5 tips:

Wake early

Setting your alarm 10 minutes early will allow you to squeeze in some gentle stretching, strengthening and breathing exercises to your day. For exercise inspiration, visit realage.com "Work Out Centre" or for personalised home exercise routines see an exercise physiologist (www.mobileexercisespecialists.com.au).

Pedal power

Brisbane's ever-increasing bikeways offer a safe route to cycle to work. Many workplaces have parking and shower facilities or try the King George Square cycle centre (www.cycle2city.com.au) for everything you need to freshen up for work. Not a cyclist? Then take your joggers and walk to work or public transport.

Stair master

Take the stairs instead of the lift or escalators. You have to get up to a particular floor anyway, so why not add to your exercise time. It's a great way to get your heart rate up and work those legs. Do it wherever stairs are an option: at work, at the shops and even when you are on your way to HealthWise!

House-work-out

Research indicates that gardeners live longer partly due to the physical activity it involves such as mowing, weeding, watering and pruning. If gardening is not your style, put some upbeat music on and make your housework a work out. These activities allow you to get fit and create lovely surroundings simultaneously.

Make time

Consider the activities in your day. Can you find at least 1 hour per week that is spent on something that is neither important nor beneficial to your life? Replace this activity with a form of social exercise you enjoy - perhaps a family or social exercise activity or a class such as yoga, tai chi, martial arts,



Detoxification

– what does it mean?

People often seem to be 'de-toxing' – and just as often 're-toxing' – particularly after periods of excess, or prolonged illness. There are many programs and protocols available to cleanse the body, rid it of toxins and renew health... but what do they do?

The aim of a good detoxification program is to reduce the overall load on the body's processes of digestion, detoxification and elimination – while at the same time, enhancing vitality and the body's natural ability to absorb valuable nutrients.

The general population is constantly exposed to damaging health factors, such as stress, poor diets, cigarette smoke, excess caffeine & alcohol, air pollution, chemicals, bacteria & viruses, heavy metals, irradiation, etc – the list goes on! Luckily, our bodies have amazing adaptive capabilities and get us through the bulk of these experiences, seemingly unscathed. However, if we do not regularly take the time to recharge our batteries and improve how we feel, then disease invariably follows. Symptoms such as ongoing headaches, sluggishness and lethargy, allergies, skin problems, aches and pains, digestive upset – all indicate the need to clean up your act. Literally.

Dietary changes, including the removal of stimulants, sugar and known allergens, is one of the most important parts of a detoxification program - as this enables the body to function better. Increasing the consumption of nutrient-dense foods, high in vitamins, minerals, fibre and antioxidants, will also support the body as it releases the residue of previously poor diet and lifestyle habits. Some

supplementation, herbal and nutritional, is often required to stimulate sluggish systems, as well as enhancing energy production and improving general vitality.

It is not unusual to feel unwell for the first few days of a program such as this, but it will not last; and after that initial phase, a sense of lightness and overall good health will follow. Detoxification programs can be followed for a short-term cleanse, such as 2 – 4 weeks, or up to several months for those wishing to make long-term changes. It is worthwhile discussing with your practitioner what would be most appropriate, and beneficial, for you.



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Do it yourself acupressure: Digestion

Stomach 36 (Zusanli) is an acupuncture point renowned for its good effect on the digestive system. It can be used for disorders of the entire gastrointestinal tract including poor appetite, excessive hunger, belching, vomiting, abdominal pain and bloating, flatulence and diarrhoea.

To stimulate Stomach 36, apply pressure to the point that is one handbreath below your knee bone (patella) and the width of your index finger from the tip of your tibia (the large bone in your lower leg). This can be stimulated daily to improve digestion and aid good health.



Ask us:

Q: I'm trying to lose weight, but I'm confused by all the different diets out there. What's the best way for me to get started?

A: This is an important question - so many people need to address their weight, but there is such a variety of ways in which to do it!

The most important thing is establishing a healthy attitude towards food, along with a balanced diet and regular exercise. As a general rule, aim to maintain a diet of small, regular meals, lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, fish and lean meats - along with plenty of filtered water, regular exercise and good quality sleep.

Many people who have poor diets and unhealthy lifestyles find that these simple steps have a significant effect on feelings of wellbeing, as well as noticeable weight loss.

Others may require stricter measures to get started, e.g. carbohydrate restriction, which stimulates the body's fat-burning capacity and brings about weight loss. Such diets should always be done under supervision of a healthcare professional.

Weight loss and dietary management can be challenging, particularly when overcoming cravings or making significant changes to an unhealthy routine. For many people, changing old habits may require the assistance of a trained professional - to educate, guide and motivate.

Here at Healthwise, we have a number of dietary programs that can be tailored to your needs. Come in and talk to our practitioners about how we can help you.

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Latest research

GREEN TEA MAY IMPROVE BONE HEALTH

Researchers in Hong Kong have found that green tea contains a group of chemicals that can stimulate bone formation and help slow its breakdown. The scientists found that exposing a group of cultured bone-forming cells (osteoblasts) to epigallocatechin (EGC), a major green tea component, boosted the activity of a key enzyme that promotes bone growth by up to 79 percent. EGC also significantly boosted levels of bone mineralisation in the cells, which strengthens bones. The scientists also showed that high concentrations of EGC blocked the activity of a type of cell (osteoclast) that breaks down or weakens bones.

YOGA REDUCES EXCESSIVE APPETITES

In a study, researchers surveyed more than 300 adults on their exercise and eating habits. Detailed questionnaires revealed that people who regularly practiced yoga had a different eating style than people who did other types of exercise. Yoga practitioners were more tuned in to their appetites and were better able to judge when they were full and stop eating accordingly. Yoga devotees also had lower body mass indexes on average.

CLINICAL RESEARCH FINDS HORSECHESTNUT COMPLEX IMPROVES LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

An Australian study has investigated the effect of Horsechestnut Complex tablets on lymphatic flow in females aged between 50 and 60 years. Measurements were taken prior to treatment and after 3 month's treatment with Horsechestnut Complex. There was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of lymphatic flow in the follow up results compared with the pre-trial data.

ORGANIC FOOD

The French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) has published the findings from an exhaustive and critical evaluation of the nutritional and sanitary quality of organic food. The major points of The French Agency for Food Safety study are;

1. Organic plant products contain more dry matter (more nutrient dense)
2. Organic plant products have higher levels of minerals
3. Organic plant products contain more anti-oxidants such as phenols and salicylic acid (known to protect against cancers, heart disease and many other health problems)
4. 94 -100 % of organic foods do not contain any pesticide residues
5. Organic vegetables contain far less nitrates, about 50% less (high nitrate levels are linked to a range of health problems including diabetes and Alzheimer's)
6. Organic chicken fillets contain 2 - 3 times less fat and are significantly higher in n - 3 fatty acid content (with reported anti-cancer effects and other health benefits).

ACUPUNCTURE REDUCES PREGNANCY PELVIC GIRDLE PAIN

A controlled trial of acupuncture and stabilising exercises for women with well defined pelvic girdle pain has shown that acupuncture offers the greatest reduction in pain. Participants in the control group were offered advice, a pelvic belt and muscle strengthening exercises. After treatment, pelvic pain was reduced significantly in the group who had stabilising exercises but the reduction in pain was even greater for those who had acupuncture.

Home health tip:

Easy sprouting

Legumes contain anti-digestive substances that protect the raw bean or pea from bacterial breakdown until they are ready to grow. To be more easily digested and to produce less 'gas' and remove harmful toxins, prepare legumes as follows:

1. Soak dry legumes for 12 hours or overnight.
2. Drain in a colander and rinse well.
3. Set the colander in a larger bowl or on a plate and leave on cupboard or convenient place.
4. Soak 5 minutes each night and morning, rinse well, drain, until sprouts are ready to eat.
5. For some sprouts, when nearly ready, husks will come away. Tip sprouts into bowl with plenty of water and skim off husks with fingers.

Sprouts store very well in refrigerator in sealed container (never frozen) for up to a week. They do not need to be rinsed any more.

For sprouting directions on individual legumes visit www.healthwiseclinic.com.au and click on the Healthy Recipe page.



Yes, We have Gift Vouchers

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We can provide you with a HealthWise gift voucher for any of our services. Treat your family and friends to massage, acupuncture or naturopathic appointments with our qualified practitioners. They will get exactly what they need to feel great! Call reception on 07 3839 1077 to purchase a gift voucher of your choice.

A Personal Note From Us

It's hard to believe that this is the last newsletter for 2009. At HealthWise, the year has seen many developments and achievements at the clinic to provide better healthcare to our patients. Our team now includes four experienced practitioners so we can cover a wide range of healing modalities and offer appointment times to most patients before work until after work everyday of the working week.

Our practitioners are all continuing to develop their skills. David will return to India for a study trip in November (so make sure to book in to see him before he leaves). His trip will take him to some leading naturopathic, acupuncture and ayurvedic health centres. Zam continues her training into yoga practice and theory. Zam and Sarah are also attending an acupuncture workshop in November with a great international teacher of this medicine. Kathleen has attended a herbal medicine conference and a complementary medicine research conference, which aims to boost knowledge and research of natural medicines.

Our website has been refreshed this year (if you have not seen it go to www.healthwiseclinic.com.au) and contains a database of health tips, healthy recipes and useful links to other websites. We will

continue to grow the website next year to be an informative resource for healthy living. We are also on Facebook now – so log on and become a fan of HealthWise Clinic for special offers and useful tips and links.

We want to wish all of our patients a very happy Christmas and New Year period. We hope you and your family have the best of health into the new year. HealthWise will be closed from 12pm 24th December and will reopen on Monday 4th January. Make sure to get your courier orders in to us by 5pm Tuesday 22nd December for pre-Christmas delivery.

Don't forget to sign up for the free HealthWise e-newsletter. We'll send you the latest health news, tips, specials and great recipes. Visit www.healthwiseclinic.com.au to subscribe.

Thank you for making HealthWise part of your health care this year.

Yours in good health,
The HealthWise team

Have you Moved?

Save the trees! Unwanted and returned newsletters cost more than just the postage. Let us know when you change your address or telephone number, or if you wish to be removed from our mailing list.

We value your feedback and ideas

Did you enjoy this issue? What did you like? What would you like to see more of? Have you got a question relating to an article? We would love to hear from you.

If unable to attend an appointment please advise us at least 24 hours in advance. By doing so, you will not deprive others of a vacancy and your courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

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