

Wellness

REVIEW

READY TO START A FAMILY?



Preconception Care – When and Where to Begin?

Are you and your partner making plans to have a baby? The preconception period is an important window of opportunity to ensure you have all of the nutrients required not only to conceive, but also to nourish the growing foetus, and ultimately deliver the healthiest baby possible. Preconception care should ideally begin at least three to four months prior to trying to conceive, allowing adequate preparation time for both parents to achieve optimal health.

Comprehensive preconception and pregnancy care involves both parents adopting a healthy diet and lifestyle, as well as appropriate supplementation to lay the nutritional foundation required to grow a healthy baby. If having a baby is on your 'to do' list in the foreseeable future, your Practitioner can guide you through an appropriate preconception and pregnancy care program specific to your individual needs.

It Takes Two, Baby!

Although it takes two to make a baby, the preconception spotlight all too often falls solely on the mother-to-be. The reality is, however, that men have more than just a small part to play in creating a healthy baby. So for the best possible outcome, both partners must be included in preconception care. Quite often, recommendations will include changes that a couple can make together, including:

- **Detoxification:** A professional detoxification program may be recommended prior to conception to reduce the effects of toxic exposure on fertility. Preconception detoxification will also protect the developing foetus from harmful toxins.
- **Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet:** There is never a more important time to be eating well than during pregnancy, and the preconception period is the perfect time to start practising. Eat a diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein, while minimising your consumption of sugar, alcohol and caffeine.
- **Participate in regular physical activity:** Regular physical activity before and throughout pregnancy offers many physical and emotional benefits including stress relief, weight control and faster recuperation following pregnancy.
- **Stress less:** Stress can be a major underlying factor affecting both male and female fertility. Minimise the impact of stress on your and your family's health by practising relaxation exercises such as meditation, yoga or tai chi. Ensure you create time to rest and do activities that you enjoy.

For the Mum-To-Be

As well as couple-based strategies, there are also gender specific recommendations when it comes to supporting healthy fertility. For the mum-to-be, a number of natural supplements may be recommended during both preconception and pregnancy. A few of these are listed below:

- **Essential vitamins and minerals:** During pregnancy, a woman's body has additional requirements for many vitamins and minerals, including folate, iodine, calcium, vitamin D, selenium and iron. These crucial nutrients have specific roles in supporting a healthy pregnancy, as well as normal brain and bone development in the

growing foetus. Your Practitioner can recommend a comprehensive, high-quality pregnancy formula to ensure you are getting all the nutrients you need at the correct doses during this important time.

- **Fish oil:** Omega-3 essential fatty acids from fish oils support many aspects of health, including a healthy pregnancy. DHA, an active ingredient naturally occurring in fish oil, is vital for the baby's brain and nervous system development. During preconception and pregnancy, it is essential to take only high quality fish oil supplements that have been specially purified to reduce heavy metal and pesticide levels that may affect the health of the foetus.
- **Herbal medicine:** Traditionally, the herb *Phyllanthus emblica* (amla) has been safely recommended to support a healthy pregnancy and may also improve recovery after giving birth. Herbal medicine, however, should only be taken during pregnancy under the guidance of a healthcare professional.

Don't Forget About Dad!

Although the female represents an obvious starting point for promoting fertility and healthy pregnancy we can't forget about the important role of the dad-to-be. Healthy sperm are essential for fertilisation to take place successfully and can also promote optimal birth outcomes. There are various considerations for supporting sperm health:

- **Antioxidants:** Sperm are the smallest cells produced by the human species and are highly susceptible to damage by free radicals. Free radicals are unstable molecules produced naturally within the body which can result in cellular damage unless balanced by a healthy amount of antioxidants, including zinc, vitamin E, vitamin C and selenium.
- **Co-enzyme Q10 (CoQ10):** CoQ10 is highly concentrated in sperm cells where it functions to provide the energy for these tiny cells to make the monumental journey to fertilise the egg.
- **Herbal medicine:** Certain herbs may also support male health in the preconception period. *Tribulus terrestris* (tribulus), for example, has traditionally been used as an aphrodisiac, and more recently has been found to support healthy testosterone levels which are crucial for sperm production.

Give Your Baby the Healthiest Start in Life

The benefits of comprehensive preconception and pregnancy care extend far beyond nine months – they last a lifetime. If you are planning to have a baby in the near future, make a conscious decision to do the best for your baby and start a preconception and pregnancy program today. Your Healthcare Practitioner can support and guide you throughout the journey of preparing for pregnancy so you can truly give your child the best possible start in life.

