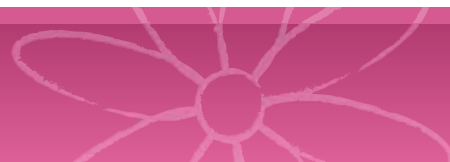


# The path to pregnancy



## Plan A – Clean Up and remove the hurdles

Getting healthy for a pregnancy involves cleaning out the bad habits, minimising the hurdles to conception and addressing ongoing health and wellbeing concerns. These include –

- Avoiding recreational, environmental and medication derived toxins
- Cleaning up the diet, detoxifying, losing or gaining weight if necessary
- Addressing stress and chronic illness

And remember, a man's sperm take months to develop before ejaculation. Any bad habits or toxin exposure can affect sperm production for months. A woman's eggs and uterine environment are also vulnerable to bad habits for at least 3 months prior to ovulation. You can improve the health of your reproductive system by addressing the following issues:

### 1. Tobacco Smoking

Tobacco and marijuana are toxic to eggs, sperm and a developing baby. They negatively affect fertility, miscarriage risk and pregnancy. They damage sperm and affect the health of the conceived baby into childhood. They should be avoided.

### 2. Alcohol

Drinking alcohol can lower fertility and increase the risk of miscarriage, low birth weight and abnormalities in the child. Conception and the first weeks following are the most critical in relation to alcohol and you may not be aware of the pregnancy at this stage. For this reason it is best not to drink at all if you are planning to become pregnant. The Australian National Research Council advises against drinking alcohol before and during pregnancy. Sperm are also affected by alcohol and so the man's intake should also be minimised.

### 3. Caffeine

High caffeine intake has been linked to reduced fertility in both males and females, miscarriage, and low birth weight. Consuming even small amounts of caffeine (less than a cup of tea) before an IVF treatment cycle can significantly reduce your chance of having a baby. If you are trying to conceive it is best to minimise caffeine intake.

*Approximate amount of caffeine per serve:*

	Caffeine	Serving size
Real coffee (espresso, brewed)	100-150 mg	150 ml
Instant coffee	60 – 100 mg	150 ml
Tea	30 – 100 mg	150 ml
Hot chocolate	30 – 60 mg	150 ml
Coke and energy soft drinks	40 – 100 mg	250 ml
Milk chocolate bar	20 – 60 mg	30 g

# The path to pregnancy



## 4. Other Toxins

Any recreational drug is potentially damaging to fertility and toxic to a pregnancy. They should be avoided by both prospective parents. Seek assistance in quitting if you are addicted. Other substances can be reproductive toxins, including the following:

- Heavy metals - lead, cadmium, mercury, aluminium, arsenic, copper
- Pesticides and fertilisers, including house fumigation chemicals
- Anaesthetics
- Solvents, printing inks, glues and paints
- Carbon monoxide
- Vinyl chloride (used in the plastics industry)
- Glycol ethers (used in the plastics industry)
- Aromatic and chlorinated hydrocarbons
- By-products of plastic and pesticide manufacturing
- Formaldehyde and various other chemicals used in industry

Radiation from nuclear imaging and medical facilities (e.g. X-ray), high voltage switchboards, flying, communication facilities, and computer equipment can be toxic to a pregnancy.

Heat stress is particularly damaging to sperm and an early pregnancy. Sources include saunas/spas, foundries, bakeries, long distance drivers, long distance bicycle rides, tight-fitting underwear and electric blankets.

Check out your workplace, your home and hobby sites for potential sources of these toxins. Seek the assistance of a healthcare practitioner to identify any sources and to give advice and treatment for the elimination of substances you may have been exposed to. It may become apparent that you need to undergo a period of detoxification before trying to conceive.

## 5. Medications

Both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medications may be a problem if you are planning to conceive or are pregnant. These include corticosteroids, some antibiotics, painkillers, antidepressants, and blood thinners. For example, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin can inhibit ovulation and may harm a pregnancy. If you are taking medication (or using one topically as a cream or patch) for an ongoing or chronic condition you must see your doctor to discuss the risks of this for fertility and pregnancy. Some medications also damage sperm, so men planning to become fathers also need to check with their doctor. These may include medications taken for high blood pressure, stomach ulcers and inflammatory conditions.

## 6. Weight Regulation

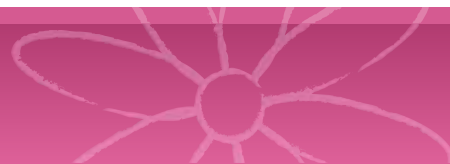
Both overweight and underweight women are at risk of fertility and pregnancy problems, so it is important to address any concerns long before trying to conceive. Weight loss of 5-10% improves ovulation and pregnancy rates in overweight and obese women. Weight loss before pregnancy improves fertility (naturally or with IVF) and reduces the risk of miscarriage, birth defects, high blood pressure, blood clotting events, diabetes, pre-term and caesarean section delivery that are associated with obesity.

Women who are underweight are at risk of not ovulating and not having adequate nutrition to support a healthy pregnancy. (See "The Path to Pregnancy Plan B – Get Healthy")

## 7. Dietary Sabotage

Bad habits die hard, but hopefully the incentive of a healthy baby is enough to kill them off! A healthy body is a more fertile body – every cell in your body, including your eggs, the lining of your uterus and your partner's sperm, is responding to the substances you put (or don't put!) into your mouth! Your nutrition is sabotaged every time you consume processed foods, skip meals, eat foods high in sugar and fat, avoid fruit or vegetables etc. Consider kick-starting your plan with a healthy balanced diet to help set you on the

# The path to pregnancy



preconception care path. Removing the dietary hurdles to health makes the steps towards pregnancy much easier. And remember – once you are pregnant you will have all the good habits in place for your baby!

## 8. Stress Management

Stress negatively affects your fertility in many ways. Stress can reduce the chance of conceiving naturally or with IVF. Fortunately we know that stress reduction programs can significantly improve the chances of having a baby. For couples who are diagnosed with infertility the stress levels can be as high as those with cancer or HIV and so significant emotional support is needed.

Find a technique that helps you. It may be yoga, tai chi, meditation, counselling, or finding a support group. A sense of humour is vital for your wellbeing. There is increasing evidence supporting the value of laughter in improving and maintaining health.

## 9. Disease Management

If you have ongoing health problems or concerns, these may impact on your fertility or a pregnancy. If, for example, you have diabetes and your blood sugar is not stable, you have a much greater risk of having a child with birth defects. If you have diabetes, epilepsy, lupus, high blood pressure, blood clotting problems, dental or gum disease, a thyroid condition or a history of STDs (especially chlamydia and vaginal infections) it is important you discuss your plans for conception with your doctor. Stabilising your condition, changing risky medications to something safer and doing some preconception tests may be necessary.

## 10. Behaviour

It is important to address any concerns you may have about your intimate relationship. If you or your partner has mental disease, is prone to depression or is subject to abuse it is important to seek professional help. A proactive approach helps ensure a happy and healthy pregnancy.