

Useful Facts

The following are useful facts could be included in the Initial Consultation as appropriate.

The effect of stress on fertility

Stress causes tremendous changes in the body's biochemistry and rhythms; it can upset the body's natural balance and over time can lead to chronic health problems. Along with impacting overall health, stress or anxiety over a prolonged period of time can lead to chronic health problems. Along with impacting overall health, stress or anxiety over a prolonged period of time can disrupt the production of the hormones needed for ovulation, implantation and sperm quality. Since the body's priority is to keep us out of danger when we are experiencing a threat or stress, taking care of a foetus would only put us under unnecessary strain.

- The hypothalamus regulates both the stress response as well as the sex hormones, which is why excessive stress can lead to anovulation, irregular menstrual cycles, and in more severe cases, to complete suppression of the menstrual cycle.
- Adrenaline is released by the adrenals when we're stressed. Adrenaline helps us escape from danger but it also inhibits the production of progesterone, which is essential for building and maintaining a lining of the uterus, thus impeding fertility.
- Prolactin (usually released by the pituitary gland to stimulate lactation in preparation for nursing) inhibits a woman's fertility so she'll be less likely to conceive during breast feeding. During times of stress, the pituitary emits high levels of prolactin.
- After prolonged stress the sympathetic nervous system can become hyper-stimulated. A hyper-stimulated nervous system sends *less* blood to the uterus and ovaries, thereby impairing their optimal functioning (*Lewis 2004*)

Lifestyle

Creating balance in our lifestyle is about reducing the habits that cause harm to us and increasing the activities that increase wellbeing. This includes work/life balance.

The following lifestyle changes will have a positive effect on fertility:

- Stop smoking: smokers are 50% more likely to miscarry and men who smoke have a lower sperm count and a 20% decrease in sperm motility.
- Stop drinking alcohol: alcohol may affect fertility and sperm quality. Even moderate drinking (less than three units a day) will decrease the chances of conception.
- Eliminate drugs: cocaine constricts blood vessels and so can affect the placenta and cause menstrual irregularities. Marijuana lowers sperm count, decreases sperm motility and lowers testosterone in males.
- Reduce caffeine: caffeine increases the chances of miscarriage and may increase the risk of developing endometriosis.
- Avoid saunas: anything that raises the temperature of a man's testicles can decrease sperm production and motility.
- Exercise gently: some research has suggested that vigorous exercise (raising heart rate over 110 beats per minute) may decrease chances of conception. (*Domar and Kelly, 2002,p271*)