

HEALTHY EATING FOR FERTILITY

A healthy diet is essential—especially when you are trying to conceive.

A woman needs to keep her body in peak condition to maximize her reproductive health so she can conceive and nourish a developing baby. A man needs to keep his sperm production at optimum levels. The human body needs the right fuels. It is crucial to eat foods that contain the right nutritional balance of vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, proteins, and carbohydrates so your body can function and grow effectively.

Protecting your digestive health

We all know that eating the right foods is important for your general well-being. But not everyone realizes the important role the digestive system plays. The digestive system is the gateway to health. It needs to be maintained in an excellent condition because it metabolizes and delivers nutrients to every organ of the body. Keeping your digestive fluids in a healthy state ensures that the foods you eat can be easily broken down and your body can absorb the nutrients needed to maintain good health. So you should avoid foods and drinks that can inflame or irritate the digestive system. That includes iced or chilled drinks straight from the fridge, as well as alcohol, chilli, or curry, which can cause extreme damage to digestive fluids.

How to maintain a healthy, balanced diet

Eating healthy is all about moderation and common sense. Eating plenty of ‘healthy foods’, limiting your intake of ‘unhealthy foods’, along with caffeine and alcohol, and not snacking between meals, are all sensible measures. At every meal, we recommend eating a balance of:

- + Fresh vegetables and fruit
- + Slow-release carbohydrates such as whole grains and pulses
- + Proteins such as chicken or fish
- + Lots of fibre and water

When eaten together, these foods are digested more slowly, and release a steady flow of energy that keeps the body feeling satisfied for longer. This is never more important than when you are trying to get pregnant.

Here are some of The Zhai Clinic’s specific recommendations of foods to enjoy, be cautious about, and avoid completely:

Foods to Enjoy

Fruit: Apples (one a day) and alternate fruits such as kiwis, oranges, grapefruits, plums, strawberries, blueberries, apricots, grapes, raspberries, blackberries, watermelon, bananas, and pears (no more than three small portions per week).

Vegetables: Spinach, beans, peas, lentils, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, potatoes, watercress, garlic, onions, leeks, tomatoes, yams, sweet potatoes, lettuce, sprouts, cabbage, mixed vegetables, pumpkin and many others.

Protein: Eating at least one type of protein at each meal—lean meat, organic or free-range chicken, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds.

Fibre: Whole grains such as wheat, barley, cereals, rice (particularly brown rice), oats, rye, and root vegetables.

Foods to be Cautions About

Red meat, including processed meats like sausages.

Dairy products: Cheese, full-fat milk, cream, and butter.

Caffeine: Caffeine intake has been linked to decreased fertility levels so we recommend avoiding completely if possible. If you do consume caffeine, reduce your intake to no more than two cups a week.

Refined foods: White bread/pasta/rice, chocolate, biscuits, sweets, or anything with added sugar.

Foods to Avoid

Iced or chilled drinks that can irritate your digestive system

Alcohol: Women who are trying to conceive are advised to avoid alcohol completely. Men should drink no more than two or three small glasses of good-quality wine per week.

Though it doesn't qualify as a food, **avoid smoking** as it has been associated with infertility, as well as the early onset of menopause in women and sperm problems in men.

Food Guidance for Specific Fertility Issues

Polycystic ovaries / PCOS: Avoid dairy and yeast products as much as possible. As a substitute, consider using almond, rice, coconut, or other non-dairy milk products. Keep your carbohydrate intake low. Chilli and hot curry should be off the menu, but do eat foods that are rich in protein.

Endometriosis: Avoid dairy and yeast products. Eat plenty of foods rich in vitamin C, including fruits and vegetables. High-fibre foods rich in vitamin B can also help reduce the effects of endometriosis on your fertility. Avoid spicy dishes and ice-cold drinks.

Irregular ovulation: Eat foods rich in vitamin B, such as wholegrain cereals, bread, lean red meat, egg yolks, green vegetables, pulses, sweetcorn, brown rice, and berries.

Fibroids: Reduce your intake of meat, alcohol, and sugar, and increase your consumption of fibre. If bleeding is heavy, eat iron-rich foods (such as lean meat, sardines, and green vegetables), as well as whole grains, or take an iron supplement when necessary.

High prolactin levels: Reduce your intake of protein and increase your consumption of foods rich in vitamin B6 such as oily fish, bananas, lean meat, and liver. Vitamin B6 supports the nervous system and helps to break down sugars and starches.

At The Zhai Clinic, we give our patients specific guidance on foods to eat and avoid depending on their Traditional Chinese Medicine diagnosis.