



One in six couples have difficulty conceiving. Here, we ask the experts to bust common myths and reveal their tips and tricks to conceiving – naturally

FACT OR FICTION?

soft drinks lower fertility

fact The long-running Nurses' Health Study has found that women who drink two or more soft drinks daily are 50 per cent more likely to experience ovulatory disorders than women who drink them less than once a week. "Both the blood-sugar roller-coaster and the [subsequent] extra [kilos] can get in the way of becoming pregnant," explain the researchers.

As for men, Danish research suggests those who drink one litre of cola daily have 30 per cent lower sperm counts than those who don't drink any.*

FACT OR FICTION?

low-fat dairy products can reduce your chances of getting pregnant

fact Women who eat two or more servings of low-fat dairy products daily are 85 per cent more likely to experience ovulatory infertility issues than women who consume little or none, according to a Harvard University study.** Why? Full-fat milk contains a mix of female and

male sex hormones, such as oestrogen, progesterone and androgens. Skimming off the fat leaves behind an uneven mix of male hormones, which can mess with your reproductive system.

On the flip side, having at least one serve of full-fat milk products daily will make you more than 50 per cent less likely to have infertility problems compared to women who have one serving per week.** Pass the cheese!

FACT OR FICTION?

lube helps sperm swim faster

fiction "The kind of lubrication that's beneficial to sperm motility is naturally produced, and not a commercial kind," advises fertility specialist and naturopath Emma Sutherland (www.emmasutherland.com.au). In fact, ►

FACT OR FICTION?

soy products reduce your chances of pregnancy

fact Soy contains phyto-oestrogens, which have oestrogen-mimicking compounds "that toy with our regular hormone balance and mess with the reproductive workings of the body", explains Nat Kringoudis, natural fertility expert and author of the ebook *Fertilise Yourself* (www.nat.kringoudis.com.au). While a safe limit for consumption has not been established, it would be wise to cut back your soy lattes to just one a day and reduce your overall intake wherever possible.

most lubricants alter the pH level in the vaginal canal and kill sperm trying to swim through to the fallopian tubes, she adds. If you do need a lubricant, try a sperm-safe brand such as Pre-Seed (www.preseed.com).

FACT OR FICTION?

bisphenol-A (BPA) plastic damages human eggs

fact BPA is a synthetic oestrogen often found in plastic food containers, drink bottles and the linings of cans. It can leach into our food and drinks, especially when heated.

One 2011 study† showed that women undergoing IVF who had high BPA levels had 24 per cent fewer eggs than women with lower levels. Meanwhile, a 2010 US study‡ found that men with high levels of BPA in their urine had 23 per cent lower sperm counts and 10 per cent more sperm DNA damage than men with no exposure.

While the link is not definitively proven and Australian regulators don't consider BPA to be a health risk, you can reduce your exposure by using SIGG-style water bottles and glass cookware (especially when reheating), and avoiding plastic containers with recycling code 7 on the bottom, as they are most likely to contain BPA.

FACT OR FICTION?

folic acid is just for the baby

fiction While taking folic acid before conception and during the first few weeks of pregnancy can prevent seven out of ten cases of neural tube defects in babies, it can also boost fertility.

Women who take a daily multivitamin containing at least 400 micrograms of folic acid and 40–80mg of iron at least six days a week are 40 per cent less likely to have trouble getting pregnant than those who don't.‡ Try Swisse Folic Acid + Iodine, \$20.95 for 150 tablets.‡



FACT OR FICTION?

your weight doesn't matter

fiction "Weighing too much or too little can interrupt menstrual cycles, throw off ovulation or stop it altogether," according to the Nurses' Health Study authors, who say the best range for fertility is a body mass index of 20 to 24.

"And fellas, don't think you're exempt – your weight also affects semen quantity and quality, and the motility of your sperm," points out Kringoudis.

Coenzyme Q10 and zinc are great supplements. Stress-reduction techniques such as acupuncture can help, too."

FACT OR FICTION?

sleep affects your reproductive hormones

fact Hit the sack early. Sleeping between 10pm–6am will reset your circadian rhythm and get your hormone levels to what they should be, says Kringoudis.

FACT OR FICTION?

alcoholic drinks hamper conception

fact "Like soy, alcoholic beverages contain oestrogen-like compounds. These 'fake' hormones set our real ones out of kilter," explains Kringoudis, who recommends no more than two glasses of wine a week for women. As for men, she adds that while they're more tolerant, they should go alcohol-free at least every second day and have no more than three drinks per sitting.

FACT OR FICTION?

it takes two to tango

fact A failure to get pregnant may have nothing to do with you: the culprit in 30–40 per cent of cases is low-quality or unhealthy sperm*. The good news is that men can turn this around in 120 days through diet and lifestyle changes, asserts Kringoudis. "The trick is to move out abnormal forms [of semen] by plenty of intercourse, with the combination of changing bad habits.

FERTILITY-BOOSTING FOODS

"To pump up your fertility, substitute sugar with protein and healthy fats – think avocados, nuts, seeds, oily fish and coconut butter," advises Kringoudis. "Our hormones are made of fats and proteins, so it's imperative we're having enough. The right combination won't see you put on weight – it will do the opposite." Her top fertility foods are eggs, avocado, maca, beans, nuts, wild salmon, coconut cream and olives.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GETTY IMAGES. TEXT BY OLIVIA RICHARDSON. *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY VOL. 171, NO. 8, 883–891 (2010). **HUMAN REPRODUCTION VOL. 22, NO. 5, 1340–1347 (2007). †HUMAN REPRODUCTION SEPTEMBER 26, 2012. ‡REPRODUCTIVE TOXICOLOGY VOL. 30, NO. 4, 532–539 (2010). ††PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE ANNUAL MEETING 2006. ‡EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF ENDOCRINOLOGY JANUARY 24, 2012. #EXPERT ADVICE IS FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY AND IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL ADVICE. ALWAYS SEEK THE ADVICE OF A GP BEFORE CHANGING YOUR DIET OR TAKING SUPPLEMENTS