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Wellness Guide

# FERTILE.HEALTH

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[www.interwovxn.com](http://www.interwovxn.com)

# DISCLAIMER

This guide is for educational purposes. The information, while co-authored by a licensed medical professional, is not meant to diagnose or treat a medical condition and does not replace the advice or care of your physician. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding your health and care plan.

## IF ONLY MAKING A BABY WAS AS EASY AS WE THOUGHT WHEN WE WERE TEENAGERS...

Did you know that we are only fertile at best 6 days of every cycle and even if everything is timed perfectly (and there are no issues) that the likelihood of conceiving in a given month is only between 5-25% based on age. And yet, many of us were under the impression that getting pregnant was easy, that as soon as we tried it would happen...but if only...for too many of us.

As a reproductive acupuncturist, who then struggled with fertility, I see the difficulty that these expectations put on women and couples. It has been years since many have had a review of how reproduction works layered with years of birth control and when it doesn't happen, it is confusing and challenges the core of our being and relationship.

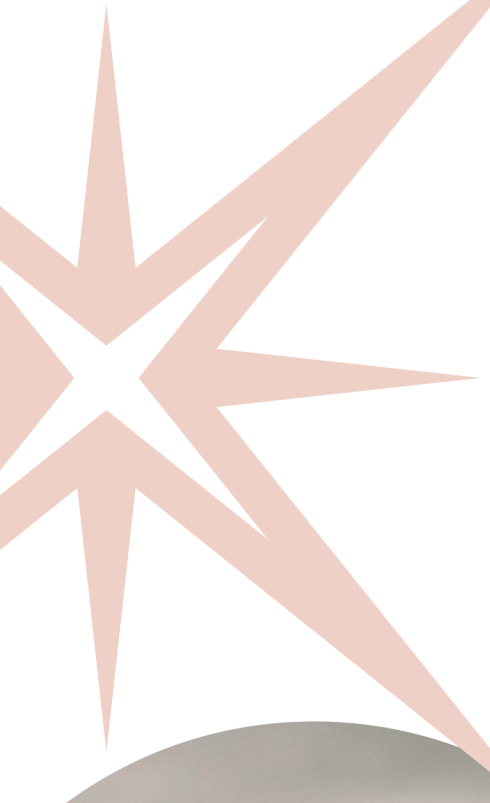
Culturally, the burden of fertility commonly falls on us as women- we are the ones tracking our cycle, paying attention to every discharge and twinge, and initiating appointments with care providers. As women, we were born with all the eggs that we will ever have and each month (if one is having regular menstrual cycles), we lose some of these. Our ovarian reserve is finite limiting our reproductive capability as we age. But we do not share this burden alone- 40-50% of all infertility cases are due to male factor infertility. Early evaluation of both partners and finding the right support, can be a game-changer and shorten the time to conception. Knowledge is power!

As for things you can do on your own to support fertility—we know that physiologically, in women, it is at least 90-100 days from when our eggs are recruited (from the reserve we were born with) to when they are mature enough for ovulation (or retrieval in IVF). And for men, it is about 70-90 days from when sperm is created to when it is ejaculated. We also know that the environment and state of the body during that time of maturation greatly affects their quality and function. Poor diet choices (or eating foods that do not agree with your body), lack of movement, lack of hydration, poor or little sleep, and stress all can lead to inflammation and reduced blood flow in the body that can negatively impact fertility. Diet and lifestyle improvements along with adding in some foundational supplements can have a significant impact whether trying naturally or pursuing fertility treatments with an REI or OBGYN.

Know that you are not alone. Infertility can feel like a lonely journey, but there is support. Find your tribe—I am grateful to have Dr. Ellen Hayes in mine and as a resource and collaborator for the couples I work with as well as this guide. We hope it provides you information to empower your journey- wherever you may be on it.

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## GET IN TUNE WITH YOUR CYCLE

Our menstrual cycle tells us a lot about the overall health of our body. It can be helpful to start tracking your cycle and ensuring that you are ovulating each cycle and when that is. This allows you to better predict your fertile window each cycle and to alert your doctor if things seem off. If you are on birth control and would like to prepare for pregnancy within the next year, talk to your doctor about the best time to stop. For more information on cycle parameters and tracking, check out our Menstrual.Cycle WOVXN Wellnes Guide.



**IT TAKES  
TWO TO MAKE  
A HEALTHY  
BABY**

**If you have a male partner, be sure you both take steps to optimize your health.**

Talk to your doctor(s) about any health issues or medications that may impede fertility so that you can both make adjustments from the start.

See your OB/GYN for a pre-pregnancy evaluation to rule out any infections, have your thyroid and vitamin D levels checked, and to make sure all the basics look good!

# Nutrition + Toxins

The food we eat, the things we put on our skin, and the products we use in our home and workplace can have a significant impact on our health. Chemicals, pesticides, plastics, and processed foods can act as endocrine disrupters and alter our hormonal balance making conception more difficult while affecting egg and sperm health.

When possible, eat whole foods versus processed, emphasizing vegetables, fruits, and lean protein. Shop organic and hormone-free when you can (including meat and dairy) and swap out your beauty and cleaning products for cleaner versions. Reduce alcohol intake and cut out nicotine and marijuana. To find information on the most important foods to buy organic and to check your skin products, go to <https://www.ewg.org/>




## Exercise + Sleep + Stress

Regular exercise and movement are great for blood flow and to maintain a healthy weight, but it is important to find the right balance. Intense exercise (or too much cycling for men) can be counter-productive to baby-making and it may be recommended to cut back (or stop during fertility treatments).

Sleep is imperative to allow our body to rest + recalibrate- including our hormones. Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep, ideally asleep before 11pm. Get into a healthy sleep routine and put away all devices at least an hour before bedtime.

Last, but not least, address stress. Fertility is stressful. Try meditation, breathing, yoga, art, or getting out in nature. Schedule date nights with your partner, find your support system (or a therapist), and say no to gatherings that may be too difficult.



Some key nutrients can be helpful in creating a healthy environment for fertility and pregnancy

## SUPPLEMENTS

Prenatal vitamin (with methylated folate)  
Men's multi or fertility-specific antioxidant formula  
Vitamin D  
CoQ10 (ubiquinol)  
Omega 3 fatty acids (fish oil)  
Probiotic

Talk to your provider about supplements specific to your needs

# ACUPUNCTURE + CHINESE MEDICINE

Acupuncture and Chinese medicine's role in supporting fertility for both women and men, whether trying to conceive naturally or alongside fertility treatment, has been studied for over 20 years. While everyone is different, acupuncture can often be a great addition to one's fertility care plan as it addresses the whole body and person. The benefits include improving blood flow to the reproductive organs (blood flow=nutrients), balancing hormones, stimulating endorphins (our feel good hormones) to reduce stress, and reducing inflammation to support overall health.

Acupuncture is meant to be a course of treatment and typically an acupuncturist might see someone weekly for 3+ months to support fertility in men and women and set a good foundation for pregnancy. As with a fertility doctor, it can be helpful to seek out someone who specializes in reproductive care and has additional training. Check out [www.aborm.org](http://www.aborm.org) for board-certified reproductive acupuncturists in your area.

## CHINESE MEDICINE TIP: WARM FEET=WARM UTERUS!

WEAR SOCKS AND KEEP YOUR FEET WARM

SWAP OUT ICED BEVERAGES FOR ROOM-TEMP OR WARM

## Tips for Male Fertility

All of the recommendations already shared are equally important for men as they are for women- diet, sleep, stress reduction, avoiding toxins, etc. But there are a few other things to consider/avoid. These include anything that could increase the temperature of the testicles as this can be detrimental to sperm- so avoiding underwear that are too tight, hot tubs, too many hours on a bike seat, or working with your computer on your lap.

The reality is that the structures of support in place for women struggling to conceive are not as available for men and yet studies have shown that infertility has just as strong an impact on men's quality of life as it does on women's. Infertility in men can also be an indicator of other underlying medical conditions and so it is important that men see their primary care physician to ensure that their health risks as a whole are being considered.



## WHEN TO SEE A FERTILITY SPECIALIST

### It depends...

When it comes to your fertility, it is important to seek care and ask questions early. After the age of 35, it is recommended to have an evaluation of both partners after 6 months of timing intercourse without pregnancy to assess sperm health and to look at hormone balance, ovarian reserve, and uterine/tubal health. The rule of thumb for women under 35 is to see an REI physician after 1 year of attempting pregnancy. Women who are 40 or over can seek care right away.



## HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT DOCTOR?

For many women, it is fine to start this conversation with a trusted OBGYN physician, however it is also appropriate to go directly to a Reproductive Endocrinologist and Infertility Specialist (REI) as your first step. This is especially true if you have any known fertility issues such as irregular periods, PCOS, or endometriosis, are over 40, or have been trying without success as mentioned above.



# FERTILE HEALTH CHECKLIST

## SPERM HEALTH

The first step in evaluation of sperm health is a semen analysis. The basic information we get from this test includes the volume of semen, sperm concentration (also called the sperm count), motility, and morphology. Although it only takes one healthy sperm to fertilize an egg, we actually need millions of sperm swimming forward through the cervix, uterus, and into the fallopian tube in order to reach the ovulated egg. Occasionally, other tests may be ordered such as hormone levels, sperm DNA fragmentation, or a capacitation score and a referral to a reproductive urologist may be recommended for further evaluation.

## OVARIAN RESERVE

Ovarian reserve refers to the quality and quantity of a woman's eggs. While age is the number one predictor of egg quality, tests can be done to help understand how a woman may respond to fertility treatment and whether her reserve is normal, low, or high. These tests include a pelvic ultrasound to determine antral follicle count (AFC) and a blood test for Anti-Mullerian hormone level. Additional testing for Follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and Estradiol levels checked on day 3 of the menstrual cycle can also help determine if the brain and ovary are communicating optimally.

## FALLOPIAN TUBES/UTERINE CAVITY

Along with a healthy egg and a healthy sperm, natural conception requires open fallopian tubes and a healthy uterine cavity for the pregnancy to implant and grow. The most common tests to check the health of the female reproductive tract include hysterosalpingogram (also called HSG or "the dye test") or a saline sonohysterogram (SIS). The HSG test uses contrast dye and X-ray while the SIS is a test is performed using ultrasound and a small amount of fluid to see the uterus and tubes.

## HORMONE BALANCE/THYROID HEALTH

The thyroid gland regulates numerous functions in the body and can impact fertility as well as risk for miscarriage. For that reason, a TSH level is checked on every woman having difficulty conceiving. There may be other specific hormone testing recommended if menstrual cycles are irregular or PCOS is suspected.

## VITAMIN D LEVELS

Vitamin D, which behaves in the body more like a hormone than an actual vitamin, is critical for many aspects of our health and can affect reproductive health in women and men. Supplementing Vitamin D, if levels are found to be insufficient or deficient, can optimize both natural fertility as well as live birth rate with fertility treatment.



# FERTILE HEALTH CHECKLIST

## CONTINUED

### CELIAC/DIGESTIVE ISSUES/FOOD SENSITIVITIES

Now more than ever we understand that gut health is important for overall health. In turn, overall health affects fertility in men and women. Some individuals experience symptoms that suggest specific food groups are causing inflammation in the body that may be counterproductive when trying to conceive. Avoiding foods that lead to these symptoms may be recommended and should be discussed with your doctor.

### PCOS/ENDOMETRIOSIS/AUTOIMMUNE CONDITIONS

Women with a history of PCOS or endometriosis, both of which can make getting pregnant more difficult, should be seen by an REI physician rather than waiting 6-12 months to seek care. Women with an autoimmune disease or a family history of early menopause should also seek care early as they may experience a more rapid decline in their egg supply.

### SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Certain STIs have a significant risk of causing scar tissue in the female reproductive tract. Testing the fallopian tubes is very important if you have had a previous infection such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). If blocked tubes are found, it is important to talk to your doctor about fertility treatment that will give you your best chance for a successful pregnancy and reduce the risk for ectopic pregnancy.

### HISTORY OF MISCARRIAGE

REI physicians also specialize in evaluation and treatment of couples experiencing multiple miscarriages, also referred to as recurrent pregnancy loss (RPL). Although having a miscarriage is common (ranging from 20-50% of pregnancies depending on the age of the woman), couples who have experienced 2 or more miscarriages can benefit from testing to help identify treatable reasons for miscarriage and prevent future losses.

"She planted three seeds over and over that  
changed her life: *I. Am. Enough.*"

-Jaiya John, *Freedom: Medicine Words for Your Brave Revolution.*

**REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE ENOUGH...AND NOT ALONE, XO**



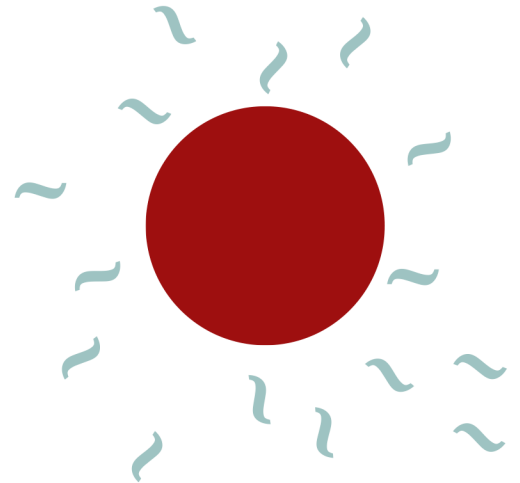
# Meet us...

Ellen Hayes, MD, FACOG, is a Reproductive Endocrinologist at Kindbody in Wisconsin and is board-certified in both Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility and OBGYN. She has helped individuals and couples build their families for over 15 years and is devoted to assisting patients facing fertility challenges. Dr. Hayes believes in providing honest and accurate information, incorporating healthy lifestyle recommendations, and taking a collaborative approach to care with each patient. She loves finding answers for her patients as well as providing the best possible experience for patients during the treatment process.

Rebecca Jankowski, L.Ac, FABORM, is the co-founder of Interwovxn and a board-certified reproductive acupuncturist with 16 years of supporting couples on their path to build family. She works collaboratively with patients and their physicians to promote well-rounded care for both mind and body.

# Resources

FOR MORE RESOURCES/INFORMATION, GO TO:  
[INTERWOVXN.COM](https://www.interwovxn.com)



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