

# Preparing for a baby – medically and physically

How you can prepare to get pregnant: Through Western medicine, nutrition, exercise and TCM.

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## 1) Physical checks and tests

If you and your spouse are now ready to have a baby, the first thing you need to do is to go for a pre-conception screening test (with the hubs), to detect any existing medical conditions. Doing so may not only increase your pregnancy chances, it will also reduce the risks of birth defects and miscarriages.

Dr Kelly Loi, a gynaecologist and fertility specialist at the Health & Fertility Centre for Women, says, "Couples today are more educated, so they're more aware of fertility issues and are willing to nip it in the bud from the start."

In the first part of the screening, the couple's medical history is documented. This looks at the family background for abnormal health conditions, such as thalassemia (genetic blood disorder). You'll also undergo a Pap smear to rule out any irregularities in the cervical area, plus get scanned

This is also a good time for you to get vaccinated again against hepatitis B and rubella because if you catch these diseases while you're pregnant, your baby can develop cataracts or congenital deformities.

Gynaecologist and *SP* expert Dr Christopher Chong also reckons that it's wise to get checked for anaemia as many women enter pregnancy slightly anaemic, since they don't replenish the iron they lose during their menses with vitamins or medication.

"Ask for less oil, salt and soya sauce, make sure everything is cooked, have a good balance of vegetables and meat, and opt for fresh-fruit juices instead of alcohol or sugary drinks."

## 2) Eating habits and nutrition

Notes Dr Jothi Kumar, an infertility and IVF specialist at O & G Partners Clinic for Women and Fertility Centre, "Obesity has been associated with a reduced chance of getting pregnant. So, try to maintain a healthy body mass index (18.5 to 22.9)."

Dr Loi adds that this can be controlled with a proper diet, highlighting a book by a group of Harvard researchers called *The Fertility Diet* that reveals how eating well can improve your fertility. In this diet, trans-fats found in commercial products and fast food are no-nos, while you are also advised to eat more vegetable protein (like beans and nuts) and less animal protein. The book also advises that you drink a glass of whole milk or eat a small serving of full-fat yoghurt or ice cream (yay!) every day.

She adds, "Also include antioxidant-rich foods such as berries and fruits, and if you're a vegetarian or on a restricted diet, take multivitamins to replace your nutritional deficiency. And don't forget folic acid to prevent spinal cord defects in your baby."

Jaclyn Reutens, a dietitian at Aptima Nutrition and Sports Consultants, recommends other fertility-boosting foods such as beef, pork and seafood to boost your red blood cells and iron levels and green, leafy veggies as these are high in folic acid and vitamin B6 (to regulate hormones and produce quality eggs). And include more whole grains to control your blood sugar levels.

"Also avoid alcohol completely, decrease your caffeine intake, stop snacking in between meals and just stick to three meals a day."

When dining out, it's all about making wise food choices, watching your portions and being picky about where you dine. Dr Chong advises, "Ask for less oil, salt and soya sauce, make sure everything is cooked, have a good balance of vegetables and meat, and opt for fresh-fruit juices instead of alcohol or sugary drinks."

What next on the pre-baby checklist? Click next...



### 3) Maintain your fitness through exercise

While weight loss is not necessarily the goal here, exercising daily to get your system going is important, whatever your size.

When the already-active 35-year-old Ava Styles fell pregnant a year back, she was determined that her exercise regimen – which included cardio and Pilates – would not take a back seat. After her first trimester, she resumed running, well into her sixth month, before switching to brisk walking and swimming – two exercises that are highly suitable for pregnant women. All this time, she was attending Pilates classes religiously.

Styles says, “Pilates strengthened my abdominal and pelvic muscles, which reduced lower back pain during my pregnancy. The breathing techniques also came in handy during delivery.” Besides some swelling in her feet, she says that she hardly experienced any cramps or pain during pregnancy. In fact, she attributes her breezy delivery to an active pre-pregnancy lifestyle.

According to TCM, the smooth flow of your *chi* (energy) and good blood circulation boosts your energy and nourishes your system. This, in turn, helps ovulation and implantation, and also eases delivery.

“I thought giving birth was going to be all screaming and tension, like it is on TV. But when it was my turn, I hardly felt any contractions, and my baby was out in two simple pushes – I kid you not!”

Just like Pilates, yoga’s gentle and specific poses can also strengthen your muscles and improve your posture and blood circulation. Another plus, its meditation and visualisation element helps you to better cope with stress and anxiety, puts your body into a state of healing, and balances your mental, physical and emotional levels.

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It's the perfect way to de-stress if you're going through IUI or IVF treatments, which can be extremely taxing, both physically and emotionally.

#### 4) Alternative treatments to prepare yourself

According to senior physician Zhong Xi Ming of Eu Yan Sang, who practises Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the smooth flow of your *chi* (energy) and good blood circulation boosts your energy and nourishes your system. This, in turn, helps ovulation and implantation, and also eases delivery.

According to Zhong, TCM practices such as acupuncture can also boost fertility as it increases blood flow to your reproductive organs, stabilises hormonal fluctuations, improves egg quality and reduces stress levels. This is also an effective way to prep your body when you're undergoing Western fertility treatments.

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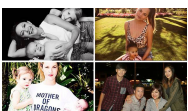
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