



From the desk of Ali Domar



Given that I just published a book for women on how to be happier, it is totally understandable that I am being asked with increasing frequency if in fact it is possible to be happy while going through infertility.

I think the answer is a complicated one but in general, I think that as difficult and painful and isolating as infertility is for most people, it is still possible to experience happiness during this time. You will obviously not feel at all happy that you aren't able to get pregnant and carry a baby to term, but that does not mean that there aren't other events in one's life which will bring bliss or contentment.

The solution is to try to figure out what aspects of your life, either past or current, made you feel the best about yourself and gave you the most joy. Infertility does not suddenly make you unable to cook a gourmet meal (unless you were a complete klutz in the kitchen before!), force you to lose interest in sports or politics, render you unable to see a perfect sunset, keep you from enjoying watching a funny movie with your partner, or make you unable to enjoy a compliment or raise from your boss. There is such a tendency to focus on how infertility negatively impacts you and on what makes you uncomfortable now-baby showers, family events with nieces and nephews the complete focus of attention, or friends saying careless and hurtful things- that one doesn't look at things in an opposite way. Skip the baby showers and take in a juicy movie with your partner, plan a nice vacation to bolster you after a family event, and splurge on a lovely piece of chocolate for each nasty or insensitive comment. Just as having a baby doesn't guarantee a lifetime of happiness, not having a baby now doesn't guarantee a lifetime of misery. There are things in your life right now which feel good, taste good, smell good, or look good. Even a moment of focus on any can bring a moment of happiness.



Ask Ali!

Dr. Domar will answer the most popular fertility questions received from our website and post them here in our quarterly newsletter. She will also post answers pertaining to general health on our website at www.domarcenter.com. If you are interested in asking Ali a question, please email us at domarinfo@domarcenter.com.

I am currently a patient at Boston IVF and have undergone 1 cycle of IVF. Although, I had a "successful" cycle (good response, many eggs, blastocyst transfer and 2 frozen blastocysts for our next cycle) I am currently questioning the effects of my job "stress" on my upcoming cycle (which will be a thaw cycle) I, of course, want to do the right thing to help in the transfer being a success and I am beginning to question how I should go about my daily routine once the embryo transfer happens. I went back to work almost the next day with the first transfer and while I was told that was ok; I work in a frenetic and fast paced environment. I have heard that stress can be a major detriment to the success of a transfer. Any help/information that you have would be appreciated.

This is a question which is posed to me all the time. In general, there is no data that I know of which shows that work stress per se causes or contributes to infertility. There have been a couple of studies which showed lower pregnancy rates in infertility patients who work outside the home when compared to stay at home infertility patients but since women who work likely have different health habits, one can not say that working lowers treatment success. There was a well done study out of California, by Hillary Klonoff-Cohen, which looked at the relationship between stress and pregnancy rates

(Continued from Ask Ali)

in women undergoing high tech treatment. She found that women who worried about missing work due to treatment had significantly lower pregnancy rates than women who did not worry. But this is not really what you are asking. My advice for you is to follow your gut feeling-if you feel that the demands of your day to day job might have an impact on your ability to conceive, then consider taking a few days off during your next cycle. I would far rather you do that than not take time off, not get pregnant, and then mentally beat yourself up for not doing everything possible. A few days sitting on the couch, carefully selecting the best selections from a box of Godiva, and watching I Love Lucy reruns is a pretty good prescription to follow.

I have your book 'Conquering Infertility, which describes a recommendation to stop exercising for 3 months to potentially help with infertility. I am a scientist going through infertility myself. I have been unable to locate publications or studies that would describe for me how you came to this conclusion. I did not find them on Pubmed, or in your book. If you could please send me any references to published studies on this issue I would be grateful.

I wish that there was the research which would truly answer our question. My recommendation comes partly from animal research and partly from my own clinical observations. There is data which shows that animals who increase their level of exercise experience lower fertility rates, especially when you combine exercise and stress. This work has been most recently demonstrated by Dr. Sarah Berga, of Emory University. There was also a paper published late in 2006, in Obstetrics and Gynecology, which showed that the level of intensity and frequency of exercise was correlated to pregnancy rates in IVF patients. The longer the woman had been exercising, and the more intense the exercise regimen, the less likely she was to get pregnant. As wacky as it sounds, the couch potatoes had the highest pregnancy rates from IVF. I have also had dozens of patients who had undergone multiple failed treatment cycles. They stopped exercising, or decreased the intensity of their workouts, and conceived immediately, sometimes without treatment. I know that this is simply anecdotal and wish I could get the funds to do a proper randomized controlled trial (I have tried and have been turned down), but it feels relatively benign to recommend decreasing one's exercise intensity for a short period of time. The only downside would be to be slightly less fit after three months but if a pregnancy doesn't occur, at least you would know that you had tried everything.

Nutrition and Your Fertility Managing Cravings as the Days Get Short

By Hillary Wright, MEd, RD, LDN



It's natural. Human beings are wired to desire foods – sometimes to the extreme in the form of cravings. Often described as an overwhelming desire to indulge in specific foods, cravings occur in about 97% of women and 68% of men, and we give into them at least ½ the time. Some cravers describe their relationship with foods they crave as an “addiction,” and truly believe they can't be trusted around them!

Unfortunately, foods we crave are frequently high in sugar, fat, salt or starch, and some people feel their cravings for these foods increase in the winter when the days are shorter and we spend more time indoors.

Many theories exist on what triggers food cravings:

- Cravings are caused by your body's desire to restock certain nutrients.
- Feelings about foods that hold strong emotional or social significance can emerge as “cravings” when we're stressed out, upset or bored.
- Sugar cravings are stronger when blood sugar levels start to decline, which can be caused by skipping meals or heavy exercise that creates a need to replete glycogen (stored sugar) reserves.
- Cravings are caused by over-restrictive dieting, causing your body to crave what it's missing.
- Low levels of serotonin, a calming brain chemical, will stimulate cravings for carbs. Carbohydrates, particularly sweets, raise serotonin levels, so eating these foods may be a way of “self medicating” when stressed, depressed or suffering from PMS or seasonal affective disorder.

Managing Cravings:

To manage cravings, try these techniques:

- When trying to lose weight, make sure to include ample complex carbohydrates - like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and lowfat milk and yogurt - to keep blood sugar levels steady.
- Eat regular meals and snacks to stay ahead of your hunger.
- Preplan an afternoon snack that includes carbohydrate, protein and fat (like peanut butter or cheese and crackers) to help avoid a mid-afternoon slump that can trigger cravings.

- Keep your kitchen clear of foods you're likely to overindulge in. Instead, when out occasionally indulge in a single-serving "fix."
- Deal with emotional baggage that leads you to seek solace in foods.

Caving in to Cravings:

No food is totally bad – it's all about how much you eat it, and how often. It's OK to give in at times. Where possible, find low fat (no more than 3 grams of fat /serving), lower calorie alternatives to tough-to-control foods, like sugar-free hot chocolate, lowfat ice cream, baked chips, light popcorn and plain or veggie pizza. But remember, when it comes to calories, there are few free rides. With any of these substitutions you need to watch your portions. In some situations, you may be better off having a small amount of the "real thing" and just factor in the calories over the day. Or on a cool fall or winter evening, maybe a warm cup of calorie-free herb tea may do the trick!

Great Snack Idea:

Most people feel the pull of hunger pangs mid-afternoon, which if left unsatisfied can lead to overeating at dinner - a sure recipe for weight gain that over time can negatively affect fertility (A.H. Balen and Colleagues, Human Fertility (Cambridge) 2007 Dec. Vol. 10; 4) The ideal snack contains some protein to help you feel full, a little whole grain to keep blood sugars steady and some added fiber or omega three fats for added health benefits. Try this nutrient packed power snack to help tide you over until dinner.

Crunchy Fruit and Flax Yogurt

Mix together -

4-6 ounces plain fat-free Greek yogurt which has a great, creamy consistency!
 2 tablespoons flax granola or 1 tablespoon of chopped walnuts (great sources of omega 3!)
 1 tablespoon dried cranberries or blueberries
 Enjoy!

Hillary Wright is the Director of Nutritional Counseling Services at the Domar Center. Hillary is a registered and licensed dietitian with a Master's degree in Health Education from Boston University and has over 18 years experience counseling clients on diet and ifestyle change. Hillary's clinical interests include nutrition and women's health and nutritional management of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). To make a nutritional counseling appointment, please call (781) 434-6578.

Acupuncture and Your Fertility Transitioning to Yin

By Michelle P. Hay



Fall is beautiful time of year. The leaves change, the weather gets cooler, and we all begin to prepare for winter.

Mentally one accepts the fact of impending snow with lots of shoveling along with more time spent indoors. However, physically your body is also transitioning. In the summer you are more Yang in nature; warmer, brighter, more fluid with better energy. The fall to winter is more Yin in nature; more quiet, introverted, with a slower pace. It is the natural progression of your body's energetic property to move inward. It is important to be prepared for this transition, especially while undergoing fertility treatment. Infertility in the world of TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) is categorized by a differential diagnosis based on signs, symptoms, tongue and pulse. The three main organ systems that influence fertility are kidney, spleen, and liver. These are not your tangible organs but more the idea of what these organs as an energetic system influence.

First, kidney energy is the way genetic information is passed on from parent to child in TCM. It heavily influences your reproductive health by determining your hormone levels and regularity of cycle. A food group that helps to strengthen your kidney in a gentle way is seeds/nuts, especially almonds. A nut is a seed for a new plant, therefore it's extremely nourishing. Chinese medicine food groups are heavily influenced by nature. Since a seed/nut represents the start of life in a plant, TCM sees this as a good way to enrich reproduction in humans.

Second is spleen energy. Your Spleen energy focuses on breaking down nutrients from food. It heavily influences the development of blood as well. Spleen does well in warm environments and hates to be cold. In order to Support your Spleen energy try to keep away from too many raw and cold foods. Limit your ice cream, make sure that no more than 25% of your weekly food intake is raw (fruit is not considered a raw food). Raw food is harder to digest than steamed or cooked foods. Having easier to digest food, from a TCM perspective, means you will have a better chance to absorb more nutrients which improves the quality of your blood.

Last is liver energy. Liver energy controls the smooth flow of your digestive and gynecological tract. Liver loves order and smooth flowing. Trying to keep your stress level in check helps things to "flow" better from a liver perspective. If you find yourself feeling stressed or overwhelmed releasing that

(Continued from Acupuncture)

that emotion is better for your liver than keeping it locked inside. Yell, cry, scream, (obviously at appropriate time and place) helps to relieve some of that internal tension which can build up and cause stagnation if left to linger.

Doing these things along with incorporating acupuncture into your weekly health plan can help to optimize your fertility by keeping you at a better level of homeostasis during the cooler months ahead.

Michelle is the Co-director of Acupuncture Services at the Domar Center. She is a graduate from the New England School of Acupuncture where she received a Masters degree in Asian Medicine and Herbal Studies. Her background and education in Respiratory Therapy allow her to have a unique perspective of both Eastern and Western medicine. Her expertise is infertility, anxiety, all gynecological issues, digestive disorders and respiratory disorders including asthma. To make an acupuncture appointment, please call (781) 434-6578.

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Domar Center Events: **Enhance your chance! 50% of all participants conceive.**

Next Ten Week Mind/Body programs:

- Mondays, September 22 – November 10, 2008, 6:30 – 9:00 pm led by Dr. Tara Cousineau, Quincy, MA
- Wednesdays, October 22 – December 16, 2008, 6:00 – 8:30 pm led by Dr. Karen Marans, Waltham, MA
- Tuesdays, November 11, 2008 – January 27, 2009 6:00 – 8:30 pm led by Dr. Melissa Freizinger, Waltham, MA

Next Weekend Retreats:

- September 20 – 21, 2008 in Waltham, MA, led by Dr. April Prewitt with participation from Dr. Alice Domar
- April 18 – 19, 2009 in Waltham, MA, led by Dr. April Prewitt with participation from Dr. Alice Domar



For more information on these programs or to register call (781) 434-6578 or visit our website at

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