



Strategies for Building a Healthy Baby

Herbal Therapies for Fertility

OUR MODELS IN NATURE CONTRAST SHARPLY with the way we currently live our lives. In nature, you must have roots before branches. The tree focuses on healthy roots before anything else. If transplanted, it might drop its leaves to put energy into first building healthy roots. It certainly would never focus energy to produce fruit unless all was right within itself.

Reproduction is an important function in the plant world, but if a plant is imbalanced you might see it die all the way back to the roots, store its energy and try again next year when it is healthy. We are acting contrary to our teachers in nature when we try to not just create branches but produce fruit before our roots are strong and our trunk is whole. We need to take care of ourselves first before we can properly nurture someone else.

When you discover that you are struggling to have a baby, minutes start to matter. With such a busy life, it can feel as though there just isn't enough time to slow down and fix your own issues, whether mental or physical. Many women pack these imbalances up in a box and set them aside so they won't interfere with the more important goal at hand. Unfortunately, our bodies don't operate that way. We cannot compartmentalize dysfunction because we are complex systems. We

must be whole and balanced in order to foster a new life that is whole and balanced. Some women may be able to conceive despite imbalance, but why be in such a rush? It is important to know how safe the many allopathic medications one might take while building a baby are, but quite honestly, this becomes a non-issue if we slow down and heal our imbalances before we try to conceive.

As a child I learned a song about a wise man and a foolish man. The foolish man built his house upon the sand and it washed away during a rainstorm. The wise man built his house upon the rock and his house withstood the storm. What a great metaphor for how to build a new life. Build your baby's foundation on the solid bedrock of your fully nourished and healthy body. It is much more complex than the difference between being foolish and wise. No woman wishes to provide a shaky foundation for her child, and it doesn't happen because she is foolish. We are building shaky foundations because our culture is not properly supporting us to create solid ones.

Giving your baby the best chance in life is so much more than taking prenatal vitamins and feeding with breast milk. Without a strong foundation, your baby can be born with structural weaknesses in such areas as the immune or digestive system. These weaknesses can be addressed, but it is much more difficult to do so *after* a child is born.

The following few chapters detail how I began building that solid foundation in my life and how I achieved balance in my own body to make it possible to conceive. Once my body balanced, it stayed balanced. In fact, after all the work to conceive the first time, our second pregnancy was a complete surprise. Today my cycle is still "in balance," and while I am no longer trying to conceive, I monitor this as an indicator of my overall health.

Through most of our journey, I was still learning to make my health and vitality a priority. I hope that my story demonstrates that balance is possible, and that a diagnosis of infertility can be overcome with time and patience. It requires a commitment to eating whole foods, working through emotional problems and reaching out to whole-plant medicine for hormonal balance. Above all it requires

a mindset that will make the health and balance of your own body a priority, in the belief that a beautiful, nutritionally complete baby will follow. My specific plan may not be anything like yours, but let it serve as a framework from which to create *your* plan to overcome *your* specific imbalance or disease.

Achieving whole-plant and whole-food health is a process worth the time and energy. It takes time to shift the paradigm for how we conceive and grow babies, and until we do, we will continue to have high rates of infertility. Our children are sicker than ever before. For the first time, their life expectancy will not surpass that of their parents.⁵ Until we start building our babies in a body that is fully healthy prior to conception, we will continue to select for a weakened human population primed and ready for degenerative conditions and diseases.

First and foremost, I recommend that every woman I consult with begin charting her temperatures and cervical fluid. Our bodies are very complex. The mistake of the allopathic model relating to fertility is to assume that any issues lie in a lack of ovulation. In my opinion, lack of ovulation is fairly rare. According to the American Pregnancy Association, one third of fertility problems are due to male issues, one third are due to women's issues with the rest unexplained. It is believed that the most common cause of infertility, coming in at approximately 25 percent of cases, is a problem with ovulation.⁶ This last figure is an estimate for which I cannot find any basis. Perhaps the 25 percent represents the women who were found to respond to the current fertility drug protocol. They would be the very women who did in fact have an ovulation issue. The 20 percent of "unexplained" fertility problems may be easier to explain than the medical establishment realizes.

Our conventional food system creates such an overabundance of estrogen in the body (from sources such as pasteurized milk products, soy and conventional meats) that it seems unlikely that many women have low levels of estrogen. Here at the farm, I meet with more women who have low levels of progesterone as a result of diet

and/or inherited imbalance. It may be that I am seeing only the outliers. One could make the argument that I see a disproportionate number of women who have not been helped by conventional medicine — those who, like me, have been labeled “broken.” At any rate, I cannot shake the conviction that progesterone levels should be looked at more closely in conjunction with individual charting for those who are more comfortable within the allopathic model.

Above all, it is important to get an individual picture of what is going on in your body before you seek treatment. Would you amputate a leg because your foot hurts? You’d probably want to have an X-ray at the very least. We all have different reasons for our imbalances, so understanding the cause of the problem should precede treatment, especially when that treatment is “one-size-fits-all.”

Charting cycles provides another important benefit. The allopathic fertility model serves to “other” the body. Rather than plugging in and learning all about ourselves, we are encouraged to distance ourselves even more and to rely on what I call “external knowing” (relying on someone else) to solve the problem. This model continues into pregnancy, when a medical professional controls the proceedings rather than allowing the body to function as it was designed. Charting demonstrates to couples that we can know our bodies. Men can understand their partners and help them stay in balance. Women too can understand their bodies and then begin to predict their cycles.

We must begin to discuss balance rather than what is “normal.” There is no universal “normal” when it comes to women’s bodies. Just as the fashion industry has established a stereotypical vision of the female figure that is not typical, most women do not operate on an idealized 28-day cycle. The trick is to understand what “balance” looks like for *you*. Once you do that, you can better understand when you are heading into imbalance. You have a better handle on your overall health, as well as an understanding of how your individual reproductive health works.

By charting, you can become intimately aware of the ebb and flow of hormones, fluids, emotions and fertility that make up your

monthly cycles. This is a tool that can help you identify patterns in heavy bleeding, spotting, heavy cramping or mood swings. By becoming acquainted with your own body you can find your balance and learn what it takes to keep it.

In a simplistic way, I view progesterone and estrogen as a teeter-totter. When the estrogen side goes up too high the progesterone side drops low, and vice versa. The key to reproductive health is balance. Using herbs and making dietary changes can be a very simple solution to allow your body to rebalance naturally.

Often women who have difficulty finding hormonal balance are experiencing a congested liver. The liver is one of the body's filters. When there are too many toxins attempting to go through it at once, it becomes clogged. The liver cleans the blood and is responsible for:

- ✦ Contributing to the regulation of blood glucose levels
- ✦ Storing the fat-soluble vitamins A, E, D, K and B₁₂ and the minerals iron and copper
- ✦ Making bile to aid the digestion of fats
- ✦ Metabolizing proteins
- ✦ Balancing hormones by filtering exogenous estrogen, corticosteroids and steroids from the blood stream
- ✦ Filtering toxins, drugs, foreign molecules and chemicals out of the bloodstream.

All of the blood that runs through our body is filtered through our liver. A strong liver therefore has the ability to strengthen and enliven every other body system as it performs more functions than any other single organ. In traditional Chinese medicine it is considered the "seat of life" and is believed to house the soul.

Symptoms of PMS and infertility, as well as imbalances associated with the kidneys, heart, skin, respiratory system and urinary tract, can often be traced back to a "clogged" liver. For this reason, it is always appropriate to work toward a decongested liver as part of any herbal therapy associated with the reproductive system.

Many herbs are available to us for this purpose. Called “alteratives,” they include sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), yellow dock root (*Rumex crispus*), dandelion root and leaf (*Taraxacum officinale*), nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and burdock root (*Arctium lappa*). Many of the herbs for the liver are roots, which by their very nature reach deep into the soil just as they reach to the depths of our imbalance. With any liver therapy it is also helpful to focus on an alkalizing diet and bitter foods that stimulate a healthy digestion. You will find more information on these herbs as well as many others that can be used in a gentle way to help the liver heal in the Healthy Baby Herbal Reference Guide at the end of this book.

Herbal Strategies for Your Partner

Balanced fertility isn't just about the female body. We have lost sight of the fact that a baby is made of two contributing cells. We value the quality of the egg and the health of the woman as the vessel in which it grows so highly that we forget the quality of the sperm, which is one half of the equation. It just isn't enough to have only one parent be fully nourished at the time of conception. Diet informs the health of the sperm as much as it does the ovum. Healthy sperm not only provide a better chance at conception, but they contribute to a balanced nutritional start for a healthy baby. This is why it is so important that both the man and the woman take the time to address their nutritional deficiencies and health imbalances before trying to get pregnant.

When a couple begins to research their issues with conception, both partners are tested. In many cases a hormonal imbalance in the female is the cause. In cases where there is an issue with sperm motility, quality or count, herbal therapies can be just as effective for men as they are for women. In too many instances, couples who find there is a reproductive imbalance with the male partner give up on their efforts to have a child. It doesn't necessarily have to be that way. It can be more difficult for a man to seek help in this area, but if both partners are equally committed to having a child this can be overcome.

Regardless of who has the primary imbalance, both members of the couple are affected and both must work on their diet together to obtain optimal health.

Diet, environmental factors and stress can wreak havoc on a man's body and cause disruptions that can impact fertility. The overconsumption of estrogenic foods does not solely affect women. Men, too, have a delicate interplay of hormones in their body that becomes imbalanced with high levels of estrogen or insulin. Lifestyle has a big role to play in many imbalances when it comes to reproduction for men. Long hours at work, dissatisfaction and depression over a job and large amounts of time sitting can all cause emotional and physical damage to the body's delicate hormonal balance. Smoking is another big contributor to fertility problems in men, just as it is in women. It has been shown that smoking contributes to impotence and that one in four male smokers has poor circulation to their penis compared to only one in twelve non-smokers.⁷

Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs also contribute to a prevalence of impotence, both long term and temporary. There is generally very little mention of this side effect and many men tend to be unaware. Sugar levels (both high and low) and insulin in the blood, causing irritation and inflammation are also big factors in what could be considered an epidemic of impotence in the United States. The Massachusetts Male Aging Study reported an average rate of impotence in men aged 40 to 70 of 52 percent.⁸ This rate increased incrementally each year after age 40. There are now reports of rising rates in even younger men.

While the endocrine system is clearly very important in this discussion, it is critical to address any stressors on the nervous and circulatory systems. Just as women can suffer from congestion in their pelvic region, so too can men. Congestion and/or improper circulation can lead to a much more visible situation for men, of course, as it often results in erectile dysfunction. The drugs prescribed for sexual dysfunction have painful and sometimes dangerous side effects. The good news is that there are safer herbal alternatives.

We aren't so different in the end as we would like to believe. At 10 weeks development, in utero, a male and a female fetus have identical reproductive structures. From there on in, the analogous structures diverge dramatically. There is evidence that these organs and glands, while they no longer look exactly the same, retain similarities of function.

The prostate is analogous to the uterus in some theories, the breasts in another. All of these organs, as will be discussed later, have sensitivities to the negative energies of others and the feelings we harbor about ourselves.

The testicles and the ovaries are similar. They are both controlled by the pituitary gland and both produce testosterone and estrogen, though in different concentrations in the male or female body. If a male experiences trauma to his testicles, he feels the pain in the same area of the body where the ovaries are located in the female and, incidentally, where the testicles were located in the male prior to birth.

Erectile tissue is found in both the male and the female around the genitals and in breast tissue. The penis and clitoris both have a glans and a foreskin. Finally, the scrotum is analogous to the labia.

When you begin to see the similarities in our reproductive structures, you can read the typical herbal differently. Most herbals are focused on how herbs affect the female body. This is most likely because most of the herbal wisdom keepers in our culture have been women, treating women. Thus, when you come upon an herb that has benefits for the pituitary gland in women, you can deduce that it will act upon the pituitary gland in men. You can further assume that the herb will act upon the testicles and help with the balance of testosterone and estrogen in the male body. While we cannot treat men as women (men tend to need more yang, or hot energy, while women need more yin, cool energy), we can begin to see how some of the same herbs can be used to treat both sexes. There are some issues that often get attributed only to men that are beginning to affect women as well. Low libido is just such a dysfunction that we must address equally for both partners for fertility to be enhanced.

The Healthy Baby Herbal Reference Guide in this book has many herbs that are useful in treating both men and women for general issues, but specific fertility notes for men are called out separately. There is no reason why male reproductive and endocrine imbalances cannot be addressed with both diet and herbs.

Foods for Preconception

Whole, nutrient-dense foods are imperative in conceiving and growing a healthy baby. Eating in preconception is very similar to eating during pregnancy, but there are some differences as you attempt to boost your fertility in preconception. Aside from the fun aphrodisiac foods, there are some things that can help focus your body on the work to come.

Superfoods

Some foods are particularly high in nutrients or phytochemical properties and are great additions to your regular diet. Yams, walnuts, bee pollen, spirulina and maca are just some examples of “superfoods” that pack the greatest punch.

Grass-fed Organic Meats

Grass-fed organic meats with their fat are especially important now as our meat supply becomes more tainted with antibiotics and unhealthy proportions of omega-3 and omega-6 due to improper feeding.⁹ Our reproductive health requires plenty of high-quality protein to function optimally. Those who don't eat meat must supplement vitamin B₁₂, zinc and iron because the absorbable forms of these nutrients are primarily found in meat. Use whole foods and whole herbs as much as possible for substitutions to ensure the body can adequately absorb the needed nutrients.

Proper Fats

If you aren't getting these, the body doesn't have what it requires to make hormones. You must have fats in your diet to get pregnant.

Good fats that will support a healthy pregnancy include coconut oil, grass-fed meats, butterfat and soaked seeds and nuts.

Organ Meats

Want to get that all-important dose of folic acid? Forget the pricey supplements and go for grass-fed organic liver! Along with vitamins B₁₂ and D, zinc and iron, it has 200 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of folic acid. For those who can't stand the taste or texture of liver, I often suggest adding it to bone broths in the last hour or so. This infuses the broth with the nutrition of liver but doesn't require chewing. You may also choose to source a high-quality desiccated liver capsule.

Essential Fatty Acids

Omega-3 in particular is great at helping to regulate hormones, increase cervical mucus and promote ovulation. EFAs can be found in salmon, flax seeds, soaked and sprouted walnuts, sardines, halibut, snapper, shrimp and scallops.

Cod Liver Oil with High-Vitamin Butter Oil

Cod liver oil is a great source of vitamins A and D, which are very important in the fertility of mom and dad. They are the precursors to many other biological functions, including the absorption of other water-soluble vitamins and minerals. It contains docosaheaxaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Altogether, this superfood is very important in contributing to proper brain function, eyesight and proper synthesis of the omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Unfortunately, cod liver oil on its own is not very effective. It is best taken with a butterfat of some kind so that its nutrition can be absorbed.

Bitters

Bitters come in all forms. You can buy a bottle of "bitters" that are created much like a tincture. You may even see one at your favorite

bar next to the liquors. In the American diet you won't find many of them on the menu, unfortunately. Foods like dandelion greens and bitter melon stimulate a part of our tongue most people aren't aware of. Nope, not the sour receptor: the bitter receptor. When stimulated, this receptor signals to our liver and gallbladder that it is time to produce bile. This is why salads at the beginning of a meal were once made up of bitter greens. They served a purpose before they became piles of sweet iceberg lettuce with a cream dressing. Without this reaction we don't produce enough digestive juices, our food doesn't get digested properly, we don't absorb nutrition and our health suffers. Why do I list it as a superfood? A lazy liver stops filtering properly. A lazy digestive system stops absorbing nutrition and eliminating waste properly. We become deficient and toxic very quickly without the bitter taste and most of us have been conditioned to avoid it at all costs.

Zinc

Zinc is a very important nutrient for both our immune system and for balancing hormones. Proper levels of zinc will help heal wounds and are needed for proper growth and development. Soaked, raw pumpkin seeds are one of the best ways to get your zinc because it is a heat-sensitive nutrient. Zinc is also found in liver, oysters, sesame seeds, yogurt, shrimp and venison.

Magnesium

Magnesium is a very important nutrient in our bodies for everything from the proper functioning of the nervous system to heart and circulatory health. If you are a woman who believes herself to be deficient in progesterone it is even more important. Proper levels of magnesium are needed to maintain proper levels of progesterone in the body. A handful of soaked, raw, organic almonds each day would cover both your need for magnesium and the all-important Vitamin E. You might also supplement your magnesium levels with a steady supply of properly prepared bone broth.

Calcium

Another important nutrient to be concerned with before conception is calcium. As we all know by now, calcium is important for bone health. It is also critical for our endocrine and reproductive systems. Without a sufficient level of usable calcium in the body it is difficult to maintain hormonal balance. Calcium deficiency can also cause menstrual difficulties. Supplementing with calcium can be problematic and controversial. Many of the supplements on the market are made from things the body cannot digest, so you are better off adding some of the calcium superfoods to your diet in preconception, such as seaweed or fermented or raw milk products.

Whole Grains

While whole grains are generally promoted as healthy, they should be soaked, sprouted or soured only! Unless grains are prepared properly, they still contain all the protective mechanisms designed to ensure survival for the seed.

Each seed that drops from a plant is wrapped in a seed coat that protects the seed from germinating at the wrong time (such as the dead of winter) and dying. The seed coat dissolves only when conditions are right for germination, usually when it is warm and wet. The protective mechanisms (often called anti-nutrients) within the seed coat include phytic acids, enzyme inhibitors, and proteins (gluten and others) in their whole, and hard-to-digest, state. By preparing our grains properly, the difficult parts of the grain can be neutralized and pre-digested to protect us from inflammation, irritation and nutrient loss.

Most traditional cultures soaked, sprouted or soured their grains. Elimination of this important step in cooking is resulting in rampant levels of digestive disorders and other degenerative diseases. The USDA food plate suggests that the American eater should focus on whole grains as a healthy choice. Unfortunately, without education on how to prepare these grains properly, this advice causes more harm than good. Increasingly, people are choosing a completely grain-free diet instead.

Unfortunately, the seed coat is not the only issue with grain. Most consumers buy bags of flour rather than the grain itself, not knowing that flour should be fresh ground and/or stored in the freezer to avoid rancidity. Further, today's grains are highly contaminated with GMOs; they must be organic to have any chance of avoiding this contamination.

Along with including higher levels of these foods in your diet, it is important to lower your intake of sugar and things that the body reads as sugar. Keep in mind that insulin is a hormone. All of our hormones need to be in balance for us to operate at our optimal level, especially when it comes to fertility. An abundance of insulin in the bloodstream will lead to inflammation and high blood sugar.

Now that I have frightened you with all the "rules," I want to give you something very simple to tie it all together. Superfoods are important when we talk about fertility because conception is a time when our body should feel like it is getting the fat of the land. The messages

Bone Broths

Much different than the soup stock you may be accustomed to, bone broth incorporates an acid to help release valuable minerals. For every quart of water you add to your bones you can generally expect to add ¼ cup of apple cider vinegar, wine, kombucha or citrus juice. Bone broths are essential to gut health and a key component to addressing digestive disorders such as "leaky gut." These magical soup bases can be eaten all on their own with a bit of seasoning, used as basic soup stocks or to cook rice or vegetables. The acid releases minerals such as calcium, potassium and magnesium as well as the all-important gelatin. This is why a good bone broth becomes solid after a night in the refrigerator. Gelatin is so important to healing our digestive system. It is a common treatment in many degenerative diseases that have inflammation at their root.¹⁰ In a food culture that routinely buys pre-packaged cuts of meat in the supermarket, we are discarding the most nutritious and readily digestible portion of our meats — the bones!

we send our body when we want to become pregnant should be about abundance, luxury and plenty. There is definitely a whole host of nutrients, fats, proteins and the like that are very important. But please hear this — if you follow all the rules but don't have a properly fired digestion *you will not* absorb most of what you feed your body.

It is very important to understand why we need to properly prepare our dairy, nuts, seeds and grains. This is *not* because the body *can't* digest them — it is because they slow down digestion. Our digestion needs to run like the coal burner of a steam engine. Food needs to go in and be completely burnt down so that the digestive system can access the nutrition trapped inside. If your digestive fire has gone out (by years of eating too much ice and sugar, not enough bitters or things that slow down digestion or reduce digestive juices) you do not burn down your food properly. Your liver and gallbladder become flaccid with a lack of exercise because you are no longer making calls to them to produce digestive juices (bile). You no longer absorb the nutrition from your food, and transit time from one end of your digestion to the other is either stopped (chronic constipation) or sped up (chronic diarrhea).

So the take-away is to know the rules but not run your life by them. Be aware that you don't want to eat very much improperly prepared grain in a given day because it will slow down your digestion and depress all of your other body systems. Too much pasteurized cheese? The same story. Chew slowly, and don't drink water with your meals except for the occasional sip. Don't eat on the run. Create your diet with a heavy handful of superfoods and the things your body can digest easily. Don't stress about the things that creep into your diet that don't match the ideal, just keep them to a minimum each day and watch your body for signs that you are over-indulging.

Unfortunately, I see a lot of women after they have tried almost everything under the sun to have a baby. They have often spent countless hours and lots of money before being flushed out of the medical system as hopeless cases. Unless they have a structural issue, even these women can achieve balance. The downside is that by this point they are often beginning to feel the pressure of their age. You read

about it everywhere. There is supposed to be a ticking time bomb on your eggs once you get past thirty-five. It can be a pretty hard sell when I start talking about an herbal therapy plan that involves slow and steady change toward balance for a year or more. When you desperately want a child, any amount of waiting can seem like an eternity, but having a child that is healthy, fully nourished and vital is worth it!

Taking the time to rebalance your body not only gives your child the best chance at a healthy life, it protects your health as a parent. The very imbalances that lead to infertility can follow you into menopause and cause difficulties. It is my strong belief that these same imbalances contribute to many of the cancers we see in later adulthood as well. I have supported many women as they decided that the medical fertility treatment route was the best choice for them. When that is the case, it is important to understand that there are herbal therapies that can support health during that process. In the end, if you do get pregnant, you need to be ready to go back and do the work you skipped over. These hormonal imbalances often show up again after pregnancy in the form of lactation issues and post-partum depression or anxiety.

Taking the time to rebalance for fertility pays off. The premier nutrition that you work into your diet and that of your partner will also prolong your years of prime fertility and offset the arbitrary timelines of medical science.

The Mental Component in Fertility

So many of the women I talk to about hormonal balance and fertility issues, in particular, have some sort of deeply buried emotional issue. In some ways, I believe women are taught to do this. "Don't dwell on that ... focus on the positives in your life." "That's the past, you won't be defined by it ... move on." Unfortunately, the truth is very different from the public's prescription for a cheery self.

Our bodies are powerfully connected to our minds. Think what a potent message an unexpressed thought like, "I'd never be able to live through a miscarriage" can be to our reproductive organs. Our bodies

powerfully protect us from what we fear. What the mind believes, the body achieves. What are you telling your body?

There are many ways to move beyond the mental traps we set for ourselves. Identifying where we get stuck in a negative cycle is a good place to start. Ritualizing the release of past emotion is something I highly recommend. Take the case, for example, of the woman who already has a child but is having trouble conceiving again. Perhaps there are physical issues, but in talking with this woman it comes out that her first child was born in a hospital and the experience of becoming a new mother was so traumatic that she has not yet dealt with her feelings about it. Since coming home from the hospital she has decided to put a brave face on things and focus on the fact that she has a healthy baby. Unfortunately, until she deals with the pain, anger and disappointment that are hiding behind that decision, her body may ultimately protect her from experiencing another birth.

It can be very helpful to actively ritualize letting go of the negativity attached to this birth. Perhaps she goes to a quiet place with a few items that remind her of the loss of power she experienced. There she may pray, sing, burn incense, journal or any number of other meaningful actions as she physically releases these muscle memories and emotions from her body. She may choose to burn or bury the items to symbolize that she is resolving these feelings and then moving on, fully integrating the experience and not allowing it to fester in denial. Ritual is a powerful way to shine light in the darkness. It has been used for centuries in religion as a way to make feelings and beliefs tangible and to celebrate or vanquish them.

What are you holding inside? What are you waiting to face? Never be fooled into thinking that the clock is ticking and you will deal with emotional issues after you get pregnant ... you may find the thing standing in your way is you.

Alternative Therapies

Diet and herbs alone can help to make some amazing changes in our overall health. But other therapies can be helpful as well. Because of