

Natural Fertility

By Dr. Charlene Chan, ND

In Chinese Medicine, a key component of the body's reproductive energy comes from the kidney energy which holds the body's essence. When the kidney energy is strong and there is enough essence, then there is reproductive health. This essence is responsible for supporting birth, growth, development and healthy aging. It is also responsible for regulating menstruation, ovulation, egg quality, uterus health, sperm health and hormonal balance.

In Western medicine, this essence parallels with the function of certain hormone precursors produced by the adrenal glands. With age, there is a natural continuous decline in these hormones in the body and therefore a decline in fertility over time. Other signs of declining hormones and kidney essence include fatigue, poor memory, low libido, graying and thinning of hair and low back pain.

A number of factors contribute to the acceleration or deceleration of this natural decline. To support natural fertility it is wise to identify and optimize those factors that enhance, rather than deplete, the essence.

Female Factors


Reasons to consider in the acceleration of aging ovaries and therefore declining egg quality include smoking, alcohol, caffeine, refined sugars, stress and anxiety. Chemicals such as pesticides and PBDEs (found in plastics and common household items such as furniture and electronics) are known as endocrine disruptors. They mimic and disrupt female hormones and may affect a woman's ability to conceive or maintain a healthy pregnancy. Modifying diet and adding in vital nutrients (folic acid, magnesium and vitamins B6, D and C) and herbs (dang quai, raspberry leaf and chasteberry) at appropriate dosages and timing have shown to benefit reproductive health as well as balance female hormones.

Male Factors

With men, issues of concern include varicoceles (enlargement of a vein in the scrotum), certain prescription medications, pesticides, air pollution, smoking, alcohol, infections, fever, excessive hot tub use, radiation and stress. These factors may negatively affect sperm health and increase DNA damage. Clinical doses of nutrients such as zinc, selenium, folic acid and vitamins B6, B12 and C may be appropriately taken in supplement form or injected through IV vitamin-mineral therapies to optimize the health of the sperm.

Address the Stress

Emotional and physical stress are also major contributors to declining essence. Excessive stress will utilize more of the body's resources, ultimately tapping into the reserves of this valuable essence. Addressing stress with acupuncture, mind-body relaxation techniques, exercise, tai chi or yoga can help the body regain balance. As a preventive measure or during these stressful times, foods such as walnuts, black beans, dates, black sesame seeds and wild rice are traditionally recommended to enhance kidney energy and essence.

The kidney essence is a valuable resource in maintaining reproductive health. Protecting the essence from accelerated decline, by minimizing factors such as stress, and enhancing this essence through naturopathic care and good nutrition will help in optimizing fertility and overall health. 

Dr. Charlene Chan is a naturopathic doctor and co-founder of Ray Clinic in Port Moody. Dr. Chan works with medical fertility specialists across the Metro Vancouver and directs the Natural and Integrative Fertility Care at Ray Clinic. For information, visit www.rayclinic.ca

