

## Be Well Advised . . . About Stress and Fertility,

Let's look at the logic of why negating the bad effects of stress can make the difference in successfully achieving a pregnancy and carrying that pregnancy to term, especially for couples with fertility issues.

Stress is the body's response to a threat – real or perceived. As soon as that danger signal sounds, we get ready to fight the foe or run away. Whether you've stubbed your toe in the dark, or just had a horrible car accident . . . your body sounds the *same* alarm it did in the days of the caveman, when our ancestors had to deal the threat of wild animals, starvation, exposure and other threats to their very existence. Cortisol and Adrenalin (the hormones that help a little old lady move a baby grand piano in a fire) tell our heart and the large muscles of our body that they are the most important weapons we have to survive the threat we face, and our bodies go to that survival mode the second we sense trouble (big or small.)

The problem is, we rarely can run from our problems today, and unfortunately, all that blood that we need for our hearts to pump and our legs to run comes from body systems our brain determines are less important at that moment . . . like the digestive and reproductive system. Ever feel that knot in your stomach when you are stressed? If you're trying to get pregnant and very anxious and stressed . . . losing that nourishing blood flow to your reproductive system needed to prepare follicles in the ovaries in which eggs mature and the uterine lining for a growing baby can be a big problem.

The cortisol hormone that gets us ready to fight or flight, is derived from the hormone progesterone. Progesterone is the primary source of testosterone and estrogen. For the male reproductive system that needs a full 72 days or more to complete the process of sperm production, and women who need weeks to for their systems to prepare eggs and the uterine lining, stress weeks before conception can impact the sperm, eggs and uterine environment at conception. It's just logical that stress works against both men and women in the desire to get pregnant, and well in advance of those few fertile days in a woman's menstrual cycle. Trying to get pregnant takes planning and stress reduction should be an important part of that preparation.

Unfortunately, in today's 24/7 society the Type A power couple may be very successful in their careers, but find themselves dealing with infertility when they want to have a child. The financial burden of infertility treatment may push a couple into a high stress situation right when they need to be calm. Life stressors rarely take a holiday just because we want to have a baby. It's a double whammy: In stressful times, blood flow is decreased to the reproductive system, and at the same time the body sacrifices progesterone from its reproductive functions to use it for making cortisol for its fight-or-flight needs.

When it comes to stress and procreation, we are not alone in our struggles. Other animals make cortisol too, usually in times of starvation or in captivity. These animals don't reproduce very well in these situations. Think about the zoo animals that have such difficulty procreating in captivity, or endangered animals that watch their numbers decline until they are extinct.

Sadly, there are other things we do in stressful times that negatively impact our fertility. Every notice how you crave carbs when you are stressed? Turn to junk food when you get anxious? Diets high in sugar and stimulants can up your cortisol levels and rob you of reproductive hormones needed for reproduction. Trouble sleeping when you're stressed? Sleep deprivation impacts the immune system and endocrine system, among others. It is a huge signal to our brains that we are in trouble. Our bodies have a long-term feedback system that monitors our status both acutely and over time. Even low-grade stress that goes on too long has a substantial negative impact on our health and fertility.

The effective strategies we teach to help you off the stress response, are life-long lessons that help with workplace, parenthood, relationship, financial, and all the other stressors that come our way. There is not time to fumble with ineffective, one-size-fits-all approaches when you are having fertility issues. It really *IS* important to "*be well advised*" in order to achieve success.