

Caffeine in, conception out?

by Tina Smith

Could that cup of joe that keeps you going on your lowest infertile days actually be working against your efforts to conceive?

Caffeine is found in the leaves, seeds and fruits of more than 60 natural plant species worldwide and is an added ingredient in a variety of beverages and foods. One eight-ounce cup of brewed coffee averages 125mg of caffeine; the same serving of tea has about half that amount. Caffeinated sodas can range from 30 to nearly 60mg. A Hershey bar (1.5 ounce) has 10mg or twice as much caffeine as a mug of hot cocoa.

Numerous studies have been done on the effects of this stimulant on conception as well as pregnancy. The findings vary widely, causing much controversy about this fertility issue. Most researchers concur that moderate amounts of caffeine – preferably less than 200mg and definitely no more than 300mg daily – have no impact on a woman's fertility or the time it takes her to conceive. The few reports linking caffeine to miscarriage typically indicate high consumption levels of 700mg or more per day.

One fact to keep in mind -- caffeine is a diuretic, so be sure to drink more fluids if you are consuming even small amounts of caffeine.

The challenge for infertile women as well as men is keeping a balanced perspective on the many factors that are suspected to negatively affect fertility, ranging from chemicals and clothing to prescription drugs and sports or even leisure activities. While moderation is the key for most environmental and recreational factors, health professionals strongly recommend that couples who are trying to have a baby avoid alcohol and tobacco.

In general, the chances of successful conception seem to decrease as alcohol consumption increases. Drinking alcohol puts women at risk for ovulatory dysfunction, hormone imbalances and miscarriage. Alcohol abuse also has been linked to pre-term birth, stillbirth and impaired fetal growth and development. For men, alcohol consumption can result in abnormal liver function and a rise in estrogen levels, which may interfere with sperm development and hormone levels. The toxins in alcohol also can kill off the sperm-generating cells in the testicles.

Smoking is a definite no-no for anyone trying to conceive a child, and second-hand smoke has been found to be equally detrimental to fertility. This warning encompasses all products

containing nicotine, marijuana and other harmful drugs. Components of smoke can concentrate in the follicles (developing eggs) of women and in the testicles of men, resulting in fewer numbers and lower quality of eggs and sperm available for fertilization. In addition to inhibiting ovarian function and prematurely aging the ovaries, smoking also can increase a woman's risk for ectopic (tubal) pregnancies as well as miscarriages. The sperm of men who smoke are slower and less apt to be shaped normally.

As for nutrition, RESOLVE recommends lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and foods that are high in folic acid and antioxidants. The National Infertility Association also encourages couples to incorporate exercise into their lifestyles and look for ways to reduce tension and anxiety that may result from battling infertility in addition to the everyday stressors in life.

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