

## *Module 8, Lesson 4 Handout:*

### **Fertility Food Recommendations**

It goes without saying that food isn't a magic bullet, but fertility and diet are definitely linked. As with pretty much any client, you'll want to start by recommending a generally healthful diet to your fertility clients: plenty of fruits and vegetables, healthful fats, minimally processed foods, limited added sugars, etc. On top of basic recommendations, there are a few more specific recommendations thought to help with fertility.

#### **Specific Recommendations for Fertility**

- Avoid trans fats. This one goes without saying these days, but it's especially important with fertility as trans fats are linked with an increased risk of infertility. Luckily, trans fats have been banned from the U.S. food supply so avoiding them isn't that hard. That said, some companies are still phasing them out of certain packaged foods, so check labels and avoid anything with "partially hydrogenated oil" in the ingredient list.
- Use unsaturated vegetable oils. Go for mono- and polyunsaturated fat sources like olive oil, avocado oil, or organic, unrefined and cold-pressed canola oil.
- Use plant based proteins. Studies have shown swapping out some animal proteins and adding in plant based proteins is linked to lower risk of infertility, and that higher intake of animal protein can increase the likelihood of infertility. Try having a few meatless days a week by utilizing beans, legumes, nuts and ancient whole grains in place of animal protein sources. As for soy, a few animal studies and some observational human studies suggest eating soy may lead to reduced fertility due to the phytoestrogen content in soy, but this research is inconsistent. There's even some research showing soy can have a positive impact on fertility among women undergoing infertility treatment. For clients who already eat soy regularly, cut back to just a few weekly servings of organic fermented soy products such as tofu and tempeh. If a client doesn't already eat soy, there's no reason to begin eating, and have all clients avoid forms of super processed soy such as soy protein isolate found in some cereals, bars, burgers and packaged foods.
- Choose fiber full carbs. Refined carbohydrates can lead to insulin spikes and have been associated with a greater risk of ovulatory infertility. On the flip side, eating high fiber grains has been shown to lower risk of infertility. Choose sprouted grain bread, ancient grains like farro, and whole grain pasta.

- Have a serving of full fat dairy every day. Research has shown women who ate one or more servings of full fat dairy every day were 27% less likely to be infertile. Go for grassfed, organic whole milk products whenever possible.
- Take a prenatal. It's generally recommended to start a prenatal once you start trying to conceive. It may help with fertility too. A Harvard study showed women who took a daily multivitamin with folic acid were 40% less likely to experience ovulatory infertility.
- Eat your iron. Research has shown iron intake is linked with a decrease in the risk of infertility. Go for leafy greens, beans, legumes, seeds, dried fruit, grass fed meat and fish.
- Drink up. Maintaining hydration can promote fertility. Drink plenty of water daily, and consider flavoring water with lemon to help encourage intake.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can affect a woman's fertility. Focus on diet and lifestyle changes if weight is a concern.
- Be active. One study found women who worked out 30 minutes or more daily had a reduced risk of infertility. Just be sure not to overdo it, as too much exercise can impair ovulation.

## Specific Foods for Vaginal Health

Remember pH from science class? As a refresher, pH is a scale (0 to 14) used to specify how acidic or basic (alkaline) something is. A healthy vagina needs to stay in the range of 3.8 to 4.5 for most of a woman's menstrual cycle. This acidic environment helps protect the vagina from things like bacteria and yeast. It also makes it a death trap for sperm. During ovulation (around day 14), an increase in cervical mucus bumps pH up to 7 or more, giving sperm a chance to survive. If vaginal pH is out of balance, sperm can't survive and chances of pregnancy are slim.

Factors such as stress, certain medications, exposure to environmental toxins and diet can impact vaginal pH. Here are some specific food recommendations to maintain optimal pH for fertility.

- Avoid fried and greasy foods, heavily processed foods, and super sugary foods. These are considered acid-forming foods and can throw the body's natural regulatory system out of whack.
- Go for probiotic rich foods like yogurt, kimchi and other fermented foods. They can balance pH levels and promote good bacteria.
- Choose prebiotic rich foods like asparagus, artichokes, leeks, onions and bananas. Prebiotics promote balanced pH by supporting the health of good bacteria.
- Incorporate cranberries. It's not just an old wives tale; there is plenty of research backing cranberries for protecting against UTIs.
- Stay hydrated. Dehydration can lead to increased acidity.