

Dr Larisa

MY NATURAL APPROACH TO FERTILITY, WELLNESS AND PREGNANCY

Featuring
The Conception Plan
as seen on This Morning and in the press

What is The Conception Plan?

There's never been a more important time to understand the importance of using lifestyle to improve our health. With lockdown restrictions meaning many are unable to access medical services, it's vital that we approach our health in a much more holistic way than we're used to. And in particular if you're looking to conceive, when your body needs to be optimally primed for pregnancy, whether you conceive naturally or using an assisted form of reproduction, such as IVF. In addition, if you're already pregnant, it's just as important to manage your lifestyle, because the newest research is showing it doesn't just affect your own health, but your baby's too, and their development.

I devised The Conception Plan at the beginning of 2019 having seen the methods I'm going to introduce you to help many men and women attempting to conceive. The plan was televised on This Morning, where couples who had a mixture of male and female subfertility, followed the pillars of the plan, and led to the birth of baby Freddie exactly one year since we launched the competition for couples to apply on the show. I do want to stress that whether you are trying as a couple or solo parent, the plan is just as applicable, only you will need to use donor eggs or sperm or a surrogate to conceive. In addition, if you are someone who is not yet considering pregnancy but wishes to optimise their health and help treat underlying chronic health conditions such as PCOS and endometriosis that can affect fertility, this plan is for you too.

It addresses everything from health, diet, fitness, stress, relationships and psychology. It's natural in its approach and uses a mixture of Western science and Eastern healing to help all those in their quest to improve their general health and, more specifically, their fertility. You can find all my top tips behind The Conception Plan on my website and my social media platforms, including videos and blogs, but for anyone new, I want to start you off with these basic principles, that form the foundation of my plan.

When it comes to trying for a baby, everyone is after that magic formula. But in truth, there is no solution that fits all and everybody is different with their own unique experience and response. The

best approach to improving fertility looks at several factors contributing towards making you and your partner the healthiest that you can be. Some of this will involve work on your body, your relationship with yourself and your partner and also, very importantly, your mind. We need to prepare both your mind and body ready to receive a pregnancy, and this is what my clean holistic lifestyle overhaul will help you to achieve. For more information or recipe, exercise and detox ideas, go and visit my website at www.drларisacorda.com.

1. **Eat well.** For many of us, especially in the winter months, we crave carbohydrates and calorie rich foods that can leave us feel heavy, bloated and drained. Instead, focus on eating organically and seasonally as this way you'll know the produce is far less likely to have been influenced by hormones, by pesticides, by added preservatives and chemicals and additives that are rich in sugar. You need to get strict about what you're putting inside of yourself as it literally influences what you conceive. All of the above can have serious and harmful effects on your own body but also, as recent epigenetic studies are showing, can be harmful in terms of influencing the development of your baby and their health later in life. You really are what you eat, and so is your baby, even before he or she is conceived. Which means what you put into your body is already having an impact on another human's health and wellbeing! You want to be eating food in its cleanest most nutritious state possible, which means buying organic where you can and not over processing or over cooking the ingredients, and having a predominantly plant based diet of seasonal and colourful fruit and veg – the darker the skin, the better the antioxidant value. But it doesn't mean depriving or starving yourself. Far from it! Flexitarian diets are rich in plant based fats, which boost your metabolism and improve blood sugar control, all great in particular if you have hormonal conditions, such as polycystic ovaries.
2. **The big No Nos!** You absolutely need to stop smoking (even e-cigarettes, though the evidence for this is not yet uncovered) as this can cause damage the lining of the womb, the eggs and sperm, but also adversely affect the health of your child, not to mention cause all sorts of complications in your pregnancy. You also need to minimise alcohol or ideally avoid it altogether, though having said that, a glass or two of wine is unlikely to cause any harm and could help with stress relief. Cigarette smoke and alcohol can affect your hormone health, but also lead to developmental problems in the baby. They can also lower libido and cause damage to sperm. The liver is the main organ in the body responsible for processing toxins. If the liver is preoccupied or overburdened with processing alcohol or cigarette toxins, then it can't do one of its other major jobs which is to clean up any substances or hormones made in the body that need to be deactivated, otherwise they themselves start to have harmful side effects on your fertility. A liver incapable of detoxing can also lead to excess oestrogen in the body and lowered levels of progesterone, the combination of which is not conducive to fertility.
3. **Stress reduction** and keeping caffeine (which is a stress activator) to a minimum or avoiding altogether is really important. Infertility is for the majority of people the most stressful situation they ever face in life. Though there is no direct association between

stress and impaired fertility (this is very difficult to prove due to so many other so called confounding factors) there is a wealth of literature to point to the problem of too much stress and activation of the sympathetic or fight or flight response, leading to raised cortisol levels and a permanent state of high alert. This can then start to create an imbalance in your fertility hormones, but in addition, can affect other organs in your body, leading to high blood pressure, problems with sleep, lowered libido and can make us resort to unhealthy lifestyle choices to help us cope with it, such as eating too much sugar for comfort, drinking alcohol, or smoking. It becomes a vicious circle and if you stop to consider it, when your body perceives a state of stress, the last thing it's going to want to invest in is pregnancy, being too preoccupied with protecting you rather than creating new life. Meditation, yoga, mindfulness, being outdoors in nature, having a bath, or spending time with close friends can all help. Acupuncture, reflexology, hypnotherapy, Shamanic healing and reiki can also prove incredibly beneficial, as they also allow you to explore the emotional and psychological basis behind infertility.

4. **Sleeping well** and ensuring your bedroom becomes a sanctuary that is conducive to sleep. During the summer, it's easier to rely on natural sunlight to make you feel more energised and help you to get through the day with fewer hours of sleep. In winter, therefore, it becomes really important to get enough rest to support our physical, mental and emotional health. This means clearing out the clutter, not using any electrical devices such as TVs and mobile phones before bed time, and ensuring the room is dark enough to allow you to get the crucial 7-8 hours sleep a night that most of us need to be able to function well. You can also use beautiful natural candles in the room, especially those with the scent of lavender, as well as a natural face oil, a naturally sourced pillow spray and hand cream, all of which can become a beautiful bedtime ritual that helps with preparing your mind and body for sleep. Sleep not only helps to combat stress, and improve libido, but it's vital to processing unnecessary and harmful substances in the body that are made each day, it helps to keep you lean and trim, and also boosts immunity, something else that's really important when it comes to fertility.
5. **On the theme of immunity**, there is growing recognition of the importance of the microbiome within our bodies and how important this is to our overall health and fertility, as well as influencing the baby's immunity and health. Take a probiotic supplement and consider eating more fermented foods to help, like sauerkraut, which is great in winter. Your gut is often referred to as your second brain, because so many substances made in the brain are also made in the gut, including serotonin. We need this to help enhance our overall sense of wellbeing, so looking after the microbiome is important for this too.
6. **If you have been on a long term contraceptive** in particular the oral contraceptive pill or copper coil, be aware that they may cause deficiencies in certain vitamins and minerals that your body requires for optimum fertility, which is even more reason to eat nutritiously and take a good multi vitamin supplement. In addition, the oral contraceptive pill can cause imbalances in a range of different hormones, that can take some time to regulate and return to their optimum state. If you are looking towards

pregnancy soon, try to consider alternative more natural means of contraception in the meantime and discuss with your doctor, such as natural cycle monitoring, which will also encourage you to understand your own body better and its pattern of behaviour.

7. **Exercise to help boost your circulation** to your reproductive organs and also to help you maintain a healthy body and mind. Exercise can also help to reduce stress but too much or being over vigorous can do the opposite, so be mindful and aim for that which is realistic and achievable for you. This will also help you to keep weight within the normal range that is vital for fertility and helps to reduce the chance of miscarriage. Remember, this is your chance to create and tone your body in preparation for pregnancy. It also gives you an excuse to get out into the great outdoors and spend time soaking up the Vitamin D that helps to improve fertility in both men and women. Exercise is known to increase levels of serotonin that can stave off depression and suppress appetite, allowing us to make healthier food choices. Whether you go for a jog, a walk, or spend time with your pets or blackberry picking if you live out in the countryside, you can then look forward to putting your feet up in front of a cosy log fire and reading a book or watching a Christmas movie, all of which combined help to release those feel good endorphins.

8. **Have sex often** and throughout your cycle. Having an excuse to get warm and cosy under the duvet on cold, dark winter nights is one of the great benefits in the lead up to warmer weather! Yes, the fertile window is important in terms of optimising chance of fertilisation and when the egg is exposed to the sperm, but the trouble is that people can become too stressed and focused on just this and sex can become a militaristic operation rather than a pleasure! As long as you're having sex several times a week, there will be sperm available to fertilise the egg, as sperm can survive in the reproductive tract for several days and recent studies are suggesting that the conventional advice of abstaining for a few days in between is perhaps overcautious and that sperm quality may actually improve with more regular sex. So be spontaneous and remember to enjoy sex – orgasm may be helpful in aiding fertilisation and having sex in the lead up to ovulation is being shown to be very beneficial to boosting immunity that makes pregnancy more likely to happen, so plenty of reasons to have sex!

9. **Get yourself on a good multivitamin supplement** a few months before you start to try but remember that this is not an alternative to a good diet, the two must go hand in hand. For men, a supplement rich in antioxidants like vitamin C, E, selenium, zinc and garlic can support healthy sperm. Women should look towards a vitamin supplement that delivers the required dose of folate, iodine and vitamin D and a range of other vitamins and minerals required for conception and a healthy pregnancy. Omega 3 is also important for both men and women as it influences the development of the baby's brain and IQ.

10. **Be mindful of the toxic elements** influencing our environment, from the water we drink, to the toxins found in cleaning products, to the make up we put on our skin, to the

plastic we use to cover our food in. Whether we absorb the toxins via the gut or the skin, or in some cases inhale around the house, the combined surface area of these organs is massive, and whatever is absorbed can get into our blood stream and end up being harmful to our hormones that control fertility, as well as the eggs and sperm. The average woman carries over 120 toxins each day, whether it comes from the products she uses on herself, to the air she inhales! There are so many pollutants that we cannot avoid being exposed to when we step outside, but we need to be addressing the environment where we can, inside our homes, and what we put into and on to our bodies. Always try and use products in their most natural state because again, much like with food, the repercussions are not just on our own bodies and health, but on our babies health too and their development. Some recent studies have also shown toxins influencing sperm DNA which can be passed on to offspring and has been linked to obesity and other health issues in the child.

11. **Focus on connection** and intimate gatherings with more time devoted to one on one relationships. There is a saying that we become the five people we spend the most time with, so make sure you chose people who bring you nourishment and joy, who support and care for you and take the time to connect with them. For all those that don't, or who judge you, make sure you detox them out of your life, much the same as you're doing with your environment!

12. **This is nature's natural nesting season** and calls for us to seek comfort not just in our relationships, but also in our food, our drinks, and our rituals. Make having a mug of tea or a warming drink an occasion to look forward to, with your feet up in front of a cosy log fire, or tucked up in bed before you go to sleep. Herbal teas are rich in polyphenols that your gut bacteria love and matcha tea has an amino acid called L-theanine that can help to reduce stress and anxiety. Also, make bath time a ritual before bed time using natural aromatherapy oils and Epsom bath salt, that when added on a regular basis, can help your body to detox. In addition, be mindful of hard water that epidemiological studies are showing may impact a range of health conditions, including reproductive and cardiovascular health. Investing in an effective water softener would be wise, to help with this, as well as limescale build up. Also consider investing in some colour therapy to help lift your mood that can often be affected by shorter daytime hours. This could be anything from buying warm coloured mugs to drink from, to cosy throws and glowing lamps, that introduce more light into a living space to help lift the atmosphere.