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Health & Happiness Coaching

Should You Detox Before Getting Pregnant?

It's also now clear that many health problems begin long before birth due to toxic exposures in the womb. Our body burden (chemical load we carry in our bodies) that we have accumulated throughout our lives and which we were exposed to in pregnancy, is now being delivered to our babies through the maternal-fetal transfer via the placenta. From conception on, our babies receive more than just our genes.

Environment Working Group studies from 2005 & in repeated years, have found more than 287 toxic chemicals in umbilical cord blood of newborns, these chemicals transferred from mother to baby. Pregnancy itself increases the mobilisation of a number of stored chemicals and heavy metals eg lead, which crosses the placenta and other common fat soluble environmental chemicals eg PCB's & dioxins released during pregnancy from the mother to the fetus, can expose the fetus to harm. Studies have shown that through the use of antibacterial soaps, toothpastes and over 2000 consumer products, pregnant women and their fetuses are being exposed to triclosan & related triclocarban, which are both endocrine disruptors.

Endocrine disruptors can affect the way hormones function in our bodies and this can have a major effect not only on our bodily functions but on our growing fetuses still in the process of sexual differentiation and development. Rates of birth defects particularly in boys has risen in recent years.

Rates of allergies, eczema, autism, ADHD, learning disabilities, obesity, Type 2 Diabetes, anxiety, depression, youth suicide, autoimmune diseases, and even cancer have risen dramatically in babies & children. The next generation's life expectancy is predicted to be shorter than ours! At least 3 decades of evidence from environmental health studies has led to growing agreement amongst scientists and many health professionals that environmental toxins are playing a role in the incidence and prevalence of these and other health conditions.

The pool of stored toxins in our bodies which when transferred to our babies can have consequences in their development, and we know that the earlier the exposure in the pregnancy the greater the harmful impact on the baby's development, which has the potential to set off a number of genetic and metabolic processes which can impact our child's life.

Worldwide data has also shown the effects of environmental endocrine disruptors causes problems with fertility with women facing difficulties conceiving. The prevalence of infertility in the world (WHO) is about 10-15%, approximately 5 million people. A 2006 article in Maternal Child Health Journal suggested that identifying blood levels of lead and exposures to toxic chemicals should be part of preconception care. Whether or not to do the preconception testing is unclear. Testing by integrative and functional medicine practitioners is expensive and their isn't a clear correlation between levels found on the tests and what input this might have on baby. And to my knowledge it is not common pre conception practice here in NZ.

Should You Do a Pre-Pregnancy Detox?

This all sounds pretty scary stuff - I know! But there are things we **can do** to mitigate the toxic burden that is passed onto them by us! Is a detox programme the answer? It does sound sensible that a pre pregnancy detox would be a no brainer to optimise babies health but hang on...our bodies are constantly detoxing, that's the job of our liver, kidneys, bowels, skin etc to do, it doesn't ever stop. So why would we need to do a "detox" and how can it be helpful?

While it is true that we are constantly detoxing, our bodies are now exposed to an unprecedented amount of chemicals than ever before. Our bodies can become overloaded by toxic loads; these chemicals come from: herbicides, pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, artificial ingredients in food & pollutants in our air, water, cosmetics, medications, vaccinations, household cleaners, furnishings, cars, storage containers; and from our own bodies breaking down our hormones & stress chemicals.

So yes a detox plan can make a huge difference in reducing our body burden and support the body's own natural detoxification processes.

Detoxing to improve fertility and prepare for pregnancy need special considerations to the **timing** of the detox, as done within a few months of conception are likely to mobilise stored toxins into the bloodstream making them *more* likely to enter the developing baby's circulation at a vulnerable time. Many experts recommend starting at least 6 months prior to the planned conception time, with a 3 month gap from finishing the detox to when you get pregnant. Detoxification during pregnancy is also not safe.

Preconception health optimisation plan

There are many things you (and your partner) can do prior to becoming pregnant. Start at least 6 months from conception:

- **First minimise the toxic exposure going INTO the body &**
 - **Support the body's natural detoxification process (help it to work more efficiently)**
1. Avoid toxic cosmetics & body products. Most women apply 10-15 body products before leaving home every morning, and most of those have countless ingredients, some of which are known toxins, including lead found in some lipsticks & eyeliners. Our skin is our biggest organ and a lot of what goes on, also goes in, leading to these chemicals being accumulated over our lifetime and then for baby to inherit.
 2. Avoid toxic household cleaners and anti bacterial anything. As above, swap out for natural cleaning options like apple cider or white vinegar, lemon juice, baking soda.
 3. Avoid high mercury containing fish ie tuna. Although fish is a good protein source, some is mercury heavy, and mercury as well as lead is particularly noxious because it affects the neurologic and hormonal systems particularly in the growing fetus. The Environmental Working Group's list of fish to avoid has more info.
 4. Avoid smoking, drugs, & excess alcohol
 5. Avoid unnecessary medications - use food as your medicine as a first line & other natural remedies to where possible avoid taking paracetamol, ibuprofen, antibiotics or other hormonal treatments.
 6. Choose 'non-stick' cookware wisely & use safe alternatives like cast-iron or stoneware. Limit your use of plastics, swap out for stainless steel or glass bottles/jars, plastic wrap for wax/silicone/beeswax wrap. Never reheat food in plastic. Avoid flame retardant chemicals. Air out your home regularly
 7. Eat organic as much as possible and/or avoid NZ's 'Dirty Dozen'. Try growing your own. Look for organic meats, dairy & eggs. Drink plenty of clean (filtered) water. Add in to your diet rich green leafy vegetables (silverbeet, spinach, broccoli, kale, brussel sprouts), good quality proteins, healthy oils (avocado, olive, coconut), organic nuts,

seeds, berries and small amounts of starches such as whole grains & kumara. Avoid processed 'fake' food, if your grandmother wouldn't recognise it or you can't pronounce the ingredients...don't eat it.

8. Take a pre pregnancy multivitamin that has methlyfolate, which is the active form of folic acid, recommended to support the formation of your babies nervous system. Omega 3 fatty acid supplement & 1000-2000 units of Vitamin D daily
9. Get to a healthy weight for your body
10. Get plenty of deep sleep
11. Include exercise which helps with detoxification. It should be fun for you and also appropriate for your current health status ie yoga may be more beneficial if you are incredibly stressed out and anxious versus a very high intensity training programme.
12. Practice stress & anxiety management. Meditation, mindfulness and restorative yoga are proven supportive strategies with free apps and Youtube videos available.
13. Support your body's optimal detoxification and natural fertility with foods, herbs & supplements, discontinuing at the time of conception unless proven safe. For example:
 - B complex (not containing folic acid), Methylfolate, bioflavonoids and antioxidants such as those found in berries blueberries, raspberries, green vegetables & most fresh vegetables as well as resveratrol
 - Branched chain amino acids to help bind & transport toxins from the body
 - N-Acetyl cysteine (NAC) which help to transform toxic forms of chemicals being eliminated by the liver into less toxic, more execrable forms
 - Herbs such as green tea extract, curcumin from turmeric, broccoli extracts, milk thistle, and artichoke extract.

If you would like support to reduce your environmental toxin exposure, learn to gently detoxify stored toxins, (in both you & your partner), by nourishing - with both food and non-food nourishment, so you will have the healthiest possible intrauterine environment for your baby, - contact Kath about joining her "**Healthy woman, Healthy Womb**" programme.

To your best health.

Kath

