Does Fast Food Affect Fertility?

By Chuck Dinerstein — May 4, 2018

You, the one trying to get pregnant, put down the Big Mac and pick up fruit it could save you up to a month of effort – a least according to a study in Human Reproduction. It seems that the preconception maternal diet has been understudied despite an association between “healthier foods or dietary patterns” and fertility.

5598 women participated in a prospective study in Commonwealth countries and their dietary habits, one month before conception, were recollected at the 14th to 16th week of their pregnancies along with the usual demographic information. Time to pregnancy (TTP) in months, was based on the question “duration of sex without contraception before conception with the father of baby.” 94% conceived without medical assistance in a median time of 2 months. The couples requiring medical aid differed more concerning alcohol, smoking, previous miscarriages and polycystic ovary syndrome – a known cause of fertility problems. The frequency of sexual intercourse was 12.6/month.

- Green leafy vegetables and fish had no impact on time to pregnancy.
- Eating fruit at least three times per day, on the other hand, reduced the time to pregnancy by 6 to 18 days
- Eating fast food at least four times per week increased the time to pregnancy by 14 to 28 days
- For women unassisted by medical intervention, the findings were statistically significant but to not as great a degree
- For women whose time to pregnancy was more than one month, fast food had no impact, but the fruit again remained statistically significant.

The authors did note strengths and limitations. The strengths were in sample size and contrary to
intuition, the study’s retrospective analysis pointing out that pregnancy studies of this type might be biased in the patients that elect to participate. Three limitations were also noted. Because they asked only about green leafy vegetables, other vegetables might have been underreported – explaining vegetables poor showing against fruit. And of course, what other manner of evil foods consumed at home was likewise unreported – limiting the true measure of fast-foods deleterious effects. Perhaps the most grievous of all limitations was the lack of information on the father’s diet, assuming that they had some role in the pregnancy.

The authors conclude with two thoughts, “Small modifications in dietary intake may have benefits for improving fertility and should be encouraged....” – that sounds a bit like eating a well-balanced diet. And of course, our favorite conclusion, “Further research is needed ...”

Source: Pre-pregnancy fast food and fruit intake is associated with time to pregnancy. Human Reproduction DOI: 10.1093/humrep/dey079

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