Stress and Infertility – The Number One Fertility Killer

by Iva Keene MRMed. ND. - Thursday, October 22, 2009


Stress and Infertility are Related

Have you ever stopped and wondered if there is a link between stress and infertility? In this article you'll see the link as well as learn a method to address stress in minutes.

The ancients left us a lot of timeless wisdom when it comes to health and well-being. Unfortunately in our fast paced instant gratification world we don’t find time to embrace some of the old truths.

Fertility as you are probably aware by now if a sign of a balanced and well nourished body. Sub-fertility and infertility are a sign of a body in need of some TLC.

Stress and Infertility are intrinsically related. Stress is health’s number one enemy. It ruins your digestive and immune system in the long run leaving your nutrient reserves empty. How does it do that? Stress causes an adrenaline release. This activates your brain and fires up your muscles for fight or flight. It’s fantastic for getting out of dangerous situations quickly, because once you escaped from the danger your adrenaline plummets and everything goes back to normal. But it’s terrible for sitting in your chair at the office staring at your IN-tray, wondering how in the world you are ever going to meet your deadline? That sort of stress doesn’t wear off as quickly and leads to high blood pressure, digestive disorders, frequent colds and flu and an array of other conditions which become apparent in the long run such as infertility. Stress is not good for fertility! So you need to find a way to stay relaxed in the middle of the hectic, stressful day to day business.

And while it would be wise to find time to exercise, meditate and do yoga regularly for the majority of people there are simply not enough hours in a day.

Wouldn’t it be great if there was something you could do while working or driving or watching TV that would reduce your stress levels, relax your muscles, and allow your digestive and immune system to go back to work in peace so that your fertility can be optimized?

Well there is something and I’m going to tell you what it is.

Actually as I’m writing this article I’m practicing a technique which is keeping my brain alert and awake but my body is relaxed and at peace.

Meet Ujjayi (pronounced: (Uuu – jai)

It comes form the yogic and Ayurvedic healing traditions. Ayurveda is the oldest healing system known to man (and woman), even older than the Chinese acupuncture.
If you do yoga you are probably familiar with it. If not Ujjayi is a way of breathing. People have referred to it as ‘Darth Vader’ breathing as it makes a similar sound in your lungs to scuba diving breathing apparatus.

How are you breathing right now? You are probably taking small, shallow breaths which barely move your chest and of which you were not consciously aware until I asked you about your breath.

As babies we used our diaphragm – a parachute like muscle – for breathing. We still use it now but not to the full extent as when we were babies. If you’ve ever seen a baby sleep you would have noticed that their whole belly is rising and falling with each breath.

Breathing provides our cells with fresh oxygen and removes toxins and CO2. Deep breathing moves they lymph along quickening the waste removal.

Shallow small breaths only use the upper portion of the lungs for breathing. However most of the blood due to gravity sinks into the lowed portion of the lungs, close to the diaphragm. This means that if you only breathe in a shallow way you will not be oxygenating and purifying a lot of blood. Your breathing is inefficient. On the other hand when you use your diaphragm to breathe your whole chest rises and falls, your abdominal muscles contract (toning your belly) massaging the organs and lifting the lungs. This way the fresh oxygen can reach the blood that’s accumulated at the bottom of your lungs and can oxygenate it whilst removing the CO2 and other toxins. As toxins add to stress and infertility, this is a fantastic way of addressing the two simultaneously.

Ujjayi breath goes something like this:

1. Sit in your chair with you back straight and your arms and legs uncrossed. Rest your feet on the floor.
2. Take a slow deep inhale through your nose (not forced) and on the inhalation make a sound in the back of your throat that sounds like VAHHH.
3. Make sure your collarbones are not rising, as if they are, you are breathing with your upper lobes and not your diaphragm. If done correctly, the area where your stomach is should be moving in and out.
4. When you can’t inhale anymore, start slowly exhaling through your nose making a sound SHHHH until there is no air left in your lungs.
5. Repeat the cycle.

The sound you make in the back of the throat (VAHHH- SHHHH ) ensures that you are contracting your diaphragm properly. Also the rhythmic sound helps you focus on the task at hand.

That’s it. Sounds simple, it’s easy to do, can be done any place any time yet the benefits to your health and fertility are enormous.

Ujjayi breathing has a direct effect on your parasympathetic nervous system - that’s the one that coordinates things subconsciously – heart beat, breath, digestion, immunity, fertility and pregnancy. The lower lobes of the lungs contain the parasympathetic nervous system’s nerve endings. By providing a massage, oxygen and clean blood to that area through diaphragmatic breathing or Ujjayi, your
parasympathetic nervous system is activated, suppressing the sympathetic nervous system responsible for
fight or flight reactions. On top of that your circulation and lymphatic system become activated, bringing
freshly oxygenated blood to your uterus, ovaries and testes and removing the sluggish, stale lymph and
blood from the area.

So you stay calm and relaxed while your body is functioning at an optimal level thereby boosting your
fertility.

All of these benefits while you are sitting in your chair working away. Try it now!

Ujjayi breathing technique is also fantastic during birth and is used by many women. It calms you and the
baby down and relaxes the muscles which is what you want when you need push. Fear and stress during
birth only cause the muscles to tighten, which is the opposite of what you need for a natural vaginal birth.
So start practicing early!

Note: Initially this breathing may give you a mental rush as your body is getting rid of all the toxins and
getting used to the increased oxygen levels, but this will only deepen your concentration, which is why
this breathing technique is used for meditating and yoga.

As you've seen stress and infertility are very much related. Breathe the stress away and shorten your time
to pregnancy! And remember all body systems are connected and play a role in your overall health and
fertility. What are your thoughts on stress and infertility? What methods do you use to de-stress?