

Stress & Fertility

By: Sue Dumais

Can stress cause infertility? Can infertility cause stress? My answer to both these questions would be YES. Speaking from my own personal experience with fertility challenges as well as my client's, I definitely believe stress can affect a couple's ability to conceive.

According to Dr. Gabor Mate, author of *When the Body Says No*, the four major causes of stress are lack of control, uncertainty, emotional isolation and the inability to express emotions. Many couples struggling to become pregnant are experiencing all 4 of these major stressors at any given time.

After spending years trying not to get pregnant most couples assume they will conceive right away. They begin to plan when they will conceive and see if the due date works with all their future plans. As each month passes the anxiety begins to accumulate as couples realize they do not have as much control over the timing of conception as they initially thought. For women each menstrual cycle can feel like a loss. A loss of control, a loss of a baby, a loss of hope.

The uncertainty of when they will have a baby is difficult for most couples especially those that are used to being in control of all other areas of their lives. After six months to a year many women begin to question their bodies, their relationship and whether they are meant to be a Mom. Their relationship can become strained as couples may begin to blame themselves and/or their partners. As they turn to the medical system for hope they are bombarded with statistics and medical tests. Some couples appear to regain some sense of control again as they choose what route to take, while others feel more uncertainty, fear and doubt.

Dealing with a fertility challenge often becomes all consuming for couples. It begins to affect their social life, work life and their relationships. Birth and pregnancy announcements become difficult to deal with as couples become more sensitive. Women may begin to withdraw from friends and family in order to avoid hearing hurtful comments or having feelings of jealousy, shame or guilt. Although most people mean well, a woman doesn't want to hear "why don't you just adopt?" when all she really wants is to become pregnant. Attending baby showers or holiday events with family can become emotional. Women may feel overwhelmed with sadness, grief and sometimes anger. Some couples choose to deal with the fertility challenge on their own. They begin to feel emotionally isolated and withdrawn.

According to Psychologist Alice Domar, the director for the Mind-Body Center for Women at Boston IVF, her research suggests that stress and the psychological symptoms associated with infertility are similar to those associated with other serious medical conditions. Domar's research also suggests that mind-body techniques that elicit a relaxation response such as meditation and yoga can reduce stress and increase a couple's chance of conceiving.

The stress and anxiety related to fertility challenges can affect a couple very deeply. The good news is that there is support available. Mind-Body techniques help reduce stress, allow couples to regain some sense of control and release pent up emotions. Couples become calmer and clearer about their fertility and the decisions they face. Their journey becomes more manageable. They learn to be more accepting, trusting and joyful.

Family Passages offers unique programs that are all based on mind-body techniques. Yoga for Fertility, Yoga Therapy, Meditation, Integrative Energy Healing and more recently our 6 week Mind-Body Program. To learn more visit www.familypassages.ca