

+ *Do you know the signs of a* HEART ATTACK?

alive

CANADA'S NATURAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS MAGAZINE

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TREASURING *together time*

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- Fitness loves company
- Focus on fertility
- Sexy spa at home

CREATE AN **ORGANIC** BEDROOM OASIS

Dark... sensuous... **CHOCOLATE**

BE HEART-HEALTHY WITH CoQ₁₀

SUN-KISSED *citrus recipes*

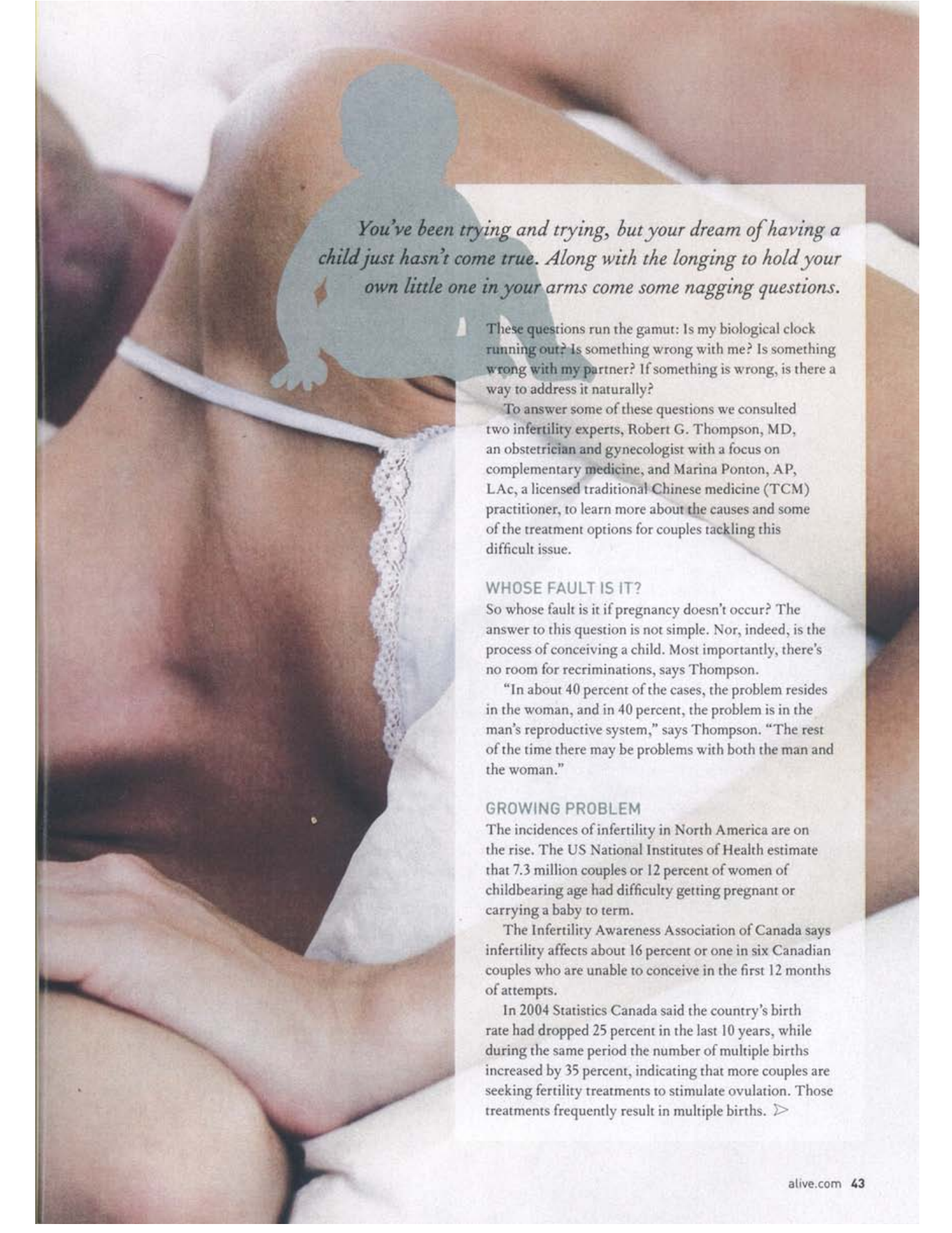
Citrus salad
Carrot and orange soup
Broiled citrus salmon
Citrus crumble

WELLNESS

Fertility

Conceiving natural remedies

Kathleen Barnes



You've been trying and trying, but your dream of having a child just hasn't come true. Along with the longing to hold your own little one in your arms come some nagging questions.

These questions run the gamut: Is my biological clock running out? Is something wrong with me? Is something wrong with my partner? If something is wrong, is there a way to address it naturally?

To answer some of these questions we consulted two infertility experts, Robert G. Thompson, MD, an obstetrician and gynecologist with a focus on complementary medicine, and Marina Ponton, AP, LAc, a licensed traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioner, to learn more about the causes and some of the treatment options for couples tackling this difficult issue.

WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

So whose fault is it if pregnancy doesn't occur? The answer to this question is not simple. Nor, indeed, is the process of conceiving a child. Most importantly, there's no room for recriminations, says Thompson.

"In about 40 percent of the cases, the problem resides in the woman, and in 40 percent, the problem is in the man's reproductive system," says Thompson. "The rest of the time there may be problems with both the man and the woman."

GROWING PROBLEM

The incidences of infertility in North America are on the rise. The US National Institutes of Health estimate that 7.3 million couples or 12 percent of women of childbearing age had difficulty getting pregnant or carrying a baby to term.

The Infertility Awareness Association of Canada says infertility affects about 16 percent or one in six Canadian couples who are unable to conceive in the first 12 months of attempts.

In 2004 Statistics Canada said the country's birth rate had dropped 25 percent in the last 10 years, while during the same period the number of multiple births increased by 35 percent, indicating that more couples are seeking fertility treatments to stimulate ovulation. Those treatments frequently result in multiple births. >

Elegant design

In order for everything to work as nature intended, several things must happen in perfect order.

- The woman must release a viable egg from one of her ovaries.
- The egg must pass through the fallopian tubes toward the uterus.
- The man's sperm must join with and fertilize the egg along the way.
- The fertilized egg must attach or implant to the uterine wall.

Any glitch anywhere in these processes can prevent pregnancy.



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ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM

Some of the causes of infertility are ones for which natural methods can be very successful for encouraging pregnancy. According to Ponton, the stress of modern life is the primary factor in unexplained infertility that affects the majority of her infertile patients.

“We live in a busy world, and we’re so career-motivated that we don’t know how to relax. This prolonged stress causes a number of body imbalances that can be successfully addressed through TCM, but it takes some time,” explains Ponton.

“Long-term use of birth control pills is another major cause of infertility among women,” Ponton adds.

“It’s not unusual for a woman to spend 10 or 15 years on birth control pills, giving their bodies the message, ‘Don’t get pregnant,’ and then decide she wants to get pregnant, requiring the whole endocrine system to readjust. It just doesn’t happen instantly,” says Ponton. “We are designed as humans to do our role to procreate. You can’t just flip [this biological process] on and off like a switch.”

She counsels patience for her patients: “It’s not unusual for it to take six to 12 months to get pregnant after a long time on the pill.”

Here’s another big issue, according to Thompson: It may seem obvious, but many couples are guilty of “poorly timed intercourse.” The old tried-and-true methods of taking your temperature every morning to determine when temperatures rise, indicating ovulation is taking place, can result in pregnancy in the most natural way possible.

DIAGNOSIS

A variety of tests can confirm infertility and potentially trigger recommendations for infertility treatments, including natural approaches.

Most healthy couples under 30 needn’t be concerned about infertility unless they’ve been trying to get pregnant for at least a year. Beyond this point, the couple may want to consider a fertility evaluation for both partners.

In the past, Ponton notes, men were reluctant to be evaluated because of the stigma attached to a perceived “lack of manliness” associated with infertility. “Fortunately, that has changed over the past few years,” she says.

Nevertheless, says Thompson, “Men are more difficult to treat because there are fewer treatment options for low sperm count or low sperm motility [swimming strength].”

Diagnosis involves complete physical exams of both partners and detailed sexual histories.

For men

Doctors will want to test semen and look at number, shape, and movement of the sperm. Testing the man’s hormones can often add helpful information.

For women

The doctor will want to know if she is ovulating each month. The simplest way to determine this is by monitoring morning body temperatures.

Recording the texture of cervical mucus and using at-home ovulation test kits can also be helpful.

As well, blood tests and ultrasound examination of the ovaries and fallopian tubes can give indications of ovulation and the woman’s potential for pregnancy.

TREATMENT

About 90 percent of infertility cases are treated with conventional medical therapies ranging from drugs to stimulate ovulation to surgery to remove scar tissue, fibroids, and blockages. In about 3 percent of cases, in vitro fertilization is used.

While these treatments can be successful, there are natural ways to address infertility that have been successful at assisting in the quest for pregnancy, both as stand-alone remedies and as adjuncts to conventional medical treatments. >

What causes infertility?

Here are some of the common clinical issues that can cause infertility in both men and women:

For women	For men	For both
age; fertility decreases after age 30; decline becomes more pronounced with time	age, though for men this is not as critical as a woman's age	environmental toxins, including pesticides and lead
being underweight or overweight; a recent study found that for every BMI point between 30-35 there was a 4% drop in conception rates while women with a BMI of over 35 were between 26% and 49% less likely to conceive compared with a BMI between 21 and 29	exposing testes to sperm-count lowering high temperatures with tight-fitting underwear, hot tub use, etc.	radiation treatment or chemotherapy for cancer
health problems that cause hormonal changes	use of certain types of prescription drugs	stress
previous history of miscarriage	erectile dysfunction related to a variety of diseases, including diabetes	nonmedical drug use
sexually transmitted diseases		alcohol use
irregular or no menstrual periods		smoking
endometriosis		poor diet
pelvic inflammatory disease		

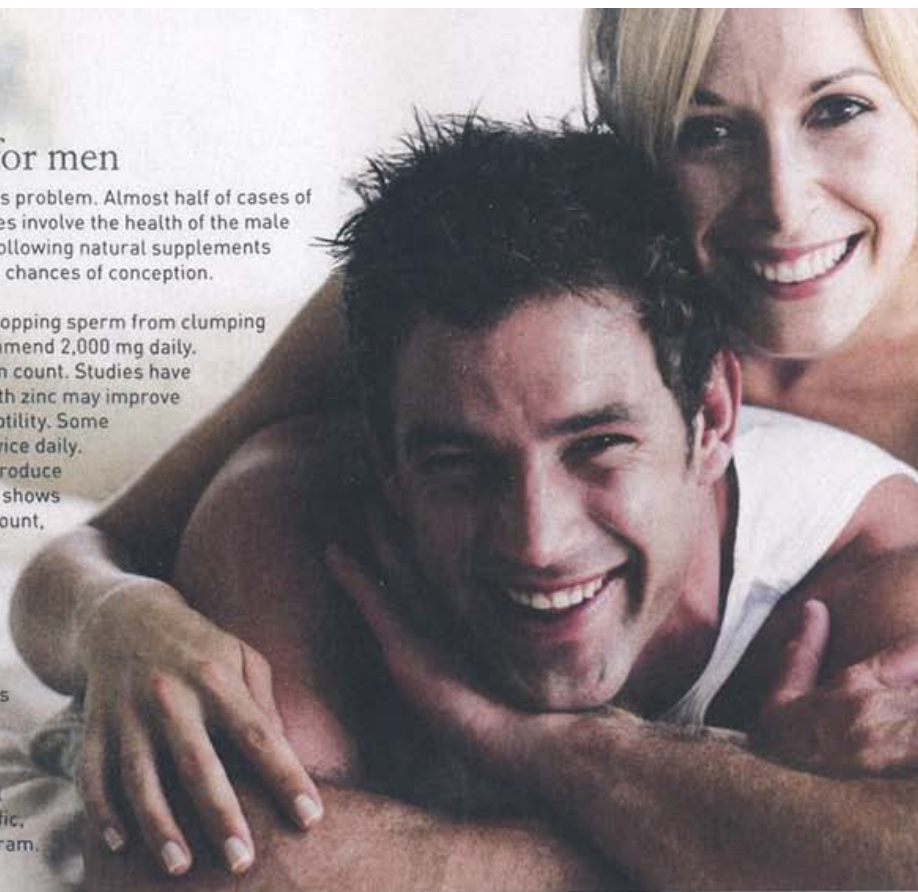


Natural fertility for men

Infertility isn't always a woman's problem. Almost half of cases of infertility experienced by couples involve the health of the male partner and of his sperm. The following natural supplements may be helpful in improving the chances of conception.

- Vitamin C may be helpful in stopping sperm from clumping together. Many doctors recommend 2,000 mg daily.
- Zinc deficiency reduces sperm count. Studies have shown that supplementing with zinc may improve sperm counts, quality, and motility. Some doctors recommend 35 mg twice daily.
- L-arginine is also needed to produce sperm. Preliminary research shows L-arginine increases sperm count, quality, and fertility. Many doctors recommend up to 4 g per day.

Coenzyme Q₁₀, essential fatty acids, chromium, selenium, copper, and B-complex vitamins have been studied for their ability to help increase a man's ability to produce healthy, viable sperm. Visit your natural healthcare provider for a specific, personalized supplement program.



SUPPLEMENTS

Thompson relies on supplements that have proven to be helpful to his patients. "I think it is important to both partners to be in excellent health to begin with. The body systems need to be balanced," he says. "For most people the best way to achieve that balance is with certain trace minerals and whole food vitamins C and E."

He's enthusiastic about chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*) to promote fertility in both women and men: to promote menstrual regularity in women and to increase testosterone levels in men.

Studies show chasteberry lowers progesterone levels in much the same manner as a woman's normal menstrual cycle to stimulate the luteinizing hormones that are essential to ovulation.

Thompson prescribes 100 to 500 mg of chasteberry daily and a hair tissue mineral analysis to determine exactly what minerals are needed to restore endocrine system balance and fertility.

He also warns women never to douche.

"Douching gives the uterus and fallopian tubes an enema of bacteria. Douching just one time is all it takes to increase the risk of ectopic (tubal) pregnancy and permanent fertility problems," Thompson cautions.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Ponton uses a protocol of TCM therapies, including acupuncture and traditional herbs, for overall body balance and stress reduction. She also uses it as a stand-alone to help increase blood flow to the uterus, increasing the chances a fertilized egg will implant.

"Western medicine looks at the body in a microscopic way. We look at it as a whole organism," says Ponton. "It's not necessary to understand what is happening or why. It's just that it works."

Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Chinese medicine to promote pregnancy, including one study which showed that the pregnancy rate in women who received acupuncture was 65 percent compared with 45 percent in a group who received Western medicine.

Finally, research shows that acupuncture and herbs alone can increase a woman's chances of pregnancy, especially when she is not menstruating due to an endocrine imbalance known as polycystic ovary syndrome.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

The holistic approach should be individualized according to the specific needs and challenges of each couple, our experts agree. **a**

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