

Beyond Webster Technique: Better Fertility Outcomes

By Jaclyn Chasse, ND

Rates of infertility in the United States have increased substantially over the past few decades. Currently, almost 1 in 8 U.S. couples struggles with infertility. Although there are increasingly technological options available to manage infertility, including medication, intrauterine insemination (IUI) and invitro fertilization (IVF), these procedures are costly, invasive and only minimally successful. Because of this, more and more couples are seeking alternative means to support their fertility, including chiropractic.

Many DCs are trained in the use of the Webster technique, a specific chiropractic analysis and diversified adjustment that, according to the International Chiropractic Pediatric Association, reduces the effects of sacroiliac joint dysfunction, improving the neuro-biomechanical function in the pelvis. Webster technique is frequently employed to support easy labors and optimal fetal positioning, but it is also used to support women trying to conceive. Even without Webster technique, many DCs have reported cases in which chiropractic adjustments in both women and men have led to conception success in couples with a history of infertility.

Infertility, of course, can be caused by a number of factors. Current research demonstrates that many factors, including stress, exposure to environmental pollutants, poor nutrition and much more, can impair the ability of both men and women to conceive. DCs have the opportunity to improve success rates for infertile couples by incorporating easy and useful therapeutics in addition to manual adjustment into visits for these couples.

Preconception Care

It would be silly to overlook the power of the basics. Even for the busiest DC, a handout on healthful living for optimal fertility can serve as an effective tool to guide patients toward conception. The Foresight Study out of the U.K. looked at 367 couples with a previous history of infertility, miscarriage and poor birth outcomes to see if preconception care could improve outcomes. All couples received nutritional counseling instructing them to consume a mostly-organic, whole-foods diet, as well as a high-quality prenatal multivitamin for both partners. After two years, 89 percent of the couples, including those previously diagnosed with infertility, conceived and delivered healthy children. There was also a severe decrease in rates of miscarriage and genetic defects among children conceived during the study.

Further research has demonstrated the positive effect of the Mediterranean diet on fertility and conception rates in couples. The Mediterranean diet is based upon high intake of fruits and vegetables, legumes, whole grains and fish, with minimal refined or processed foods. One study from the Netherlands showed that adherence to a Mediterranean diet increased the probability of pregnancy by 40 percent in 161 couples. Another study out of Spain looked at 2,154 women and found that those with the greatest adherence to the Mediterranean diet (versus a Western diet) showed the lowest difficulty getting pregnant. In addition to what to eat, instructing patients to decrease or avoid known teratogens including alcohol, cigarettes and caffeine can assist in repairing their fertility.

A patient handout could also include recommendations on how to decrease exposure to pollutants that are known and suspected to impair fertility. The most well studied of these is bisphenol A (BPA),

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found in many plastics, as well as parabens that are found in many topical cosmetics and beauty products, and various pesticides and chemical additives to food. Guidelines could include shopping for foods stored in glass over plastic; to avoid storing, freezing and reheating leftovers in plastic containers; and to choose natural cleaning and body products.

Water filtration is another helpful recommendation, as many private and municipal water supplies may be contaminated with chlorine, fluoride or heavy metals. Measurable levels of agricultural chemicals and even pharmaceutical medications have been detected in some municipal water supplies, which can impair fertility. Simple filtration with a carbon filter removes many of these contaminants and may help to reduce exposure to fertility-impairing compounds.

Various stress-reduction techniques have been effective in improving fertility rates in those trying to conceive. It is suspected that just as structural misalignment can impair the nervous system's ability to communicate effectively with reproductive organs; stress hormones such as cortisol can impair the endocrine communication pathways, altering hormonal signaling among the hypothalamus, pituitary gland and reproductive organs. Recommendations for local resources for stress management, including yoga, meditation, counseling or therapeutic recreation, can be of great assistance for your patients.

Supplementation

Whether or not you offer supplements through your practice in general, for couples trying to conceive, a few supplements can go a long way. Studies have demonstrated significantly improved pregnancy rates in women on a prenatal multivitamin, with pregnancy rates nearly doubling with its inclusion. Additional research has demonstrated that increased intake of omega-3 fats improves the health of egg and sperm. Inclusion of fish oil for patients trying to conceive can provide this essential nutrient to ensure maximal egg and sperm quality.

For couples with identified causes of infertility, additional nutrients can give support to improve sperm parameters or egg quality. For sperm, nutrients such as CoQ10, carnitine, zinc and selenium can help to overcome oxidative stress that damages the gametes and makes it more difficult for conception. In women, research on the potent antioxidant melatonin has shown promise that it may help to improve egg quality and pregnancy rates. DHEA, CoQ10, zinc and selenium may also be beneficial for women to improve fertility.

For many couples, chiropractic care is the most accessible route to obtain recommendations on how to live healthfully and use more natural, less invasive techniques to manage their health complaints. Patients with infertility are no exception, and DCs are the perfect clinicians to support couples trying to conceive. Providing patients with a resource handout to cover many of these recommendations is time well-spent, as you have the opportunity to help them achieve pregnancy sooner.

Resources

1. Vujkovic M. et al. *Fertil Steril*. 2010 Nov;94(6):2096-101.
2. Toledo E. et al. *Fertil Steril*. 2011 Nov;96(5):1149-53.
3. Agrawal R. et al. *Reprod Biomed Online*. 2012 Jan;24(1):54-60.

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