



## **Preconception Health Care – Fact Sheet**

### **Is preconception health care a new idea?**

No. Many traditional societies practiced preconception health care, such as the Ancient Greeks and Romans whose conceiving couples abstained from alcohol prior to and during pregnancy due to its damaging effects on the development of the foetus. Many traditional societies fed special diets to their young women and men of childbearing age. Veterinarians, stockbreeders and farmers all practice preconception health care, by feeding selective diets to their animals prior to conception attempts.

### **Why is there renewed interest in this practice now?**

Currently,

- 1 couple in 6 is infertile
- 1 woman in 5 will suffer a miscarriage
- 1 baby in 10 is born prematurely
- 1 in 30 is born with a congenital defect
- At least 1 child in every 10 suffers from a learning or behaviour problem
- 1 child in 5 suffers from asthma

Yet the combined evidence of many eminent medical researchers shows that all these conditions are frequently preventable with preconception health care.

### **'Are there any studies which demonstrate the effectiveness of preconception care?'**

*FORESIGHT*, the Association for the Promotion of Preconception Care was established in the UK in 1978. A study involving 1100 couples is currently being run with Surrey University. Another 2 year study of 367 couples was completed in 1992 where originally 59% of the couples had prior adverse reproductive history, including 38% miscarriage, and 37% infertility (1-10 years). Upon completion of the study 89% of all the couples had successful births of healthy babies, including 81% of those who were previously 'infertile'. No baby was born before 36 weeks and none was lighter than 5lb. 3oz (2368gms). **There were no miscarriages, no perinatal deaths and no malformations. No baby was admitted to Special Care. In comparison to any similar sized population sample who do not practice preconception health care, approximately 70 miscarriages and 12 malformations usually occur.**

### **What are the benefits of preconception health care?**

Preconception health care can help to:

- Resolve infertility in both females and males
- Decrease the risks of miscarriage, premature birth and stillbirth
- Decrease the risk of congenital malformations
- Improve general and reproductive health
- Avoid post-natal depression

## **What is the most important component of preconception health care?**

Most importantly, both partners equally undertake preconception health care: 50% of the genetic material comes from the female and 50% from the male.

The other essential component of preconception health care is optimal nutrition. Every step of reproduction, from the production of sperm and maturation of eggs to the formation of healthy breast milk, is reliant upon an essential supply of vitamins, trace minerals, amino acids and essential fatty acids. However, nowadays an individual's level of nutrition is often inadequate due to modern processing of foods, lifestyle issues and environmental hazards. This was demonstrated by a CSIRO study that found 67% of Australian women received less than the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of zinc in their diets. Zinc is needed for more than 200 enzyme reactions in the body and is of fundamental importance for reproduction.

## **What else is involved in preconception health care?**

In the Natural Fertility Management preconception program, treatment aims to address all conditions that may affect reproductive health, including:

- *Screening for heavy metals (e.g. lead, mercury, aluminium) and essential minerals (e.g. zinc, iron)*
- *Avoiding common environmental pollutants*
- *Avoiding common social drugs (e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, caffeine)*
- *Exercise, stress management and positive thinking*
- *Naturopathic medicines to treat reproductive and fertility problems in both males and females*
- *Treatment of food, chemical and environmental allergies*
- *Screening and treatment of infections, especially genito-urinary infections*
- *Natural Fertility Management contraceptives (avoiding oral contraceptive pills, IUD's)*

## **How long before pregnancy do we need to practice preconception health care?**

Sperm production can take up to 116 days, and the eggs mature for approximately 100 days prior to ovulation, during which time they are both vulnerable to damage. Therefore, preconception health care for both partners needs to be practiced for at least 4 months prior to conception attempts.