

# Preparing for Pregnancy

## A Couple's Ayurvedic Guide to Fertility

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Ayurveda has a long tradition of supporting and promoting pregnancy. In fact, Ayurveda emphasizes the preconception period just as much, if not more, than the pregnancy period itself. The preconception time offers a golden opportunity to provide the best of the both of you to your future child. Ayurvedic preconception care takes advantage of our body's natural ability to cleanse and renew. No matter what your past experiences with fertility are, Ayurveda offers a complete approach to fertility that embraces both the male and the female roles as equally important.

## The Spiritual Side of Fertility

The lens of Ayurveda broadens our vision to see that fertility is more than the physical act of becoming pregnant. Fertility is first about your shift into parenthood, as a couple, which comes well before conception. It begins with your first true desire to begin a new family. This desire serves as an invitation to the new soul.



In this way, understand that fertility is equally spiritual and emotional as it is physical. Appreciate that achieving fertility is also about achieving the healthiest child possible on *all* dimensions so that the soul may fulfill its purpose to the highest degree.

The purpose of this guide is to lead you through the journey of preconception preparation before arriving at the doorstep of pregnancy. The guide will start with an overview of the anatomy of fertility—the essential elements that must operate well for conception to occur—and then, with this understanding, walks through the phases of preconception preparation, step-by-step.

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*There are many nontraditional routes for building a family, including donor eggs and in vitro fertilization, that some of your individual situations may call for. In those cases, jump in and out along the series of steps as appropriate. Even in the case of adoption, most of these steps still apply since the cleansing and building also serve the spiritual and emotional preparation that is common to all routes.*

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## Four Essential Elements of Fertility

For conception to occur, Ayurveda says that there are four essential components that must work together optimally—timing (*rtu*), the field (*kshetra*), fluids and nutrition (*ambu*), and the seed (*bija*).<sup>1</sup>

### Timing (Rtu)

Most couples focus on this one factor more than any other. It begins with the most basic question—“Are we ready?”—and continues as you follow the female’s menstrual cycle to determine when ovulation occurs. Even seasons can be incorporated into timing, since nature, as a whole, is most fertile during spring—trees are budding, eggs are hatching, and the juiciness of spring replaces the dryness of winter. Consider the factors in Table 1 for examining how timing is manifesting in your life, understanding that it is not as black and white as the table illustrates and that there are shades of gray in between.



**Table 1. Considerations for Timing (Rtu) of Conception**

Optimal	Not Optimal
Stability in life; settled in with responsibilities, finances, and duties	Financial stress, major shifts at work and other responsibilities, any other instability that is taxing yourself (such as a sick parent or loved one)
Peaceful time in the world	Major wars and recent calamities close to home
Spring season	Fall season
Regular, <b>healthy menstrual cycles</b> , indicating regular ovulation	Lack of ovulation, skipped cycles

## The Field (Kshetra)

Like timing, the field (kshetra) also has a macro manifestation of the entire human body, which applies to both men and women, and a more micro manifestation of the uterus, literally the field in which the pregnancy grows. Beginning with a healthy body supports a healthy microsphere. A great illustration of this relationship is polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), a condition that some of you may be very familiar with. In this condition, high levels of unprocessed kapha in the body, particularly from sugar and increased resistance to insulin, contribute greatly to decreased, and in many cases absent, ovulation.

**Table 2. Considerations for The Field (Kshetra)**

Optimal	Not Optimal
Free of toxins ( <i>ama</i> )	High ama, accumulated toxins from a diet full of toxins or poor food combining
Doshas balanced	Large imbalances in doshas
Uterus with a clear passage and regular shape of the cavity	Uterus with large masses (fibroids) or anomalies in shape
No obstruction of the fallopian tubes	Tubes blocked by scarring from infections or diseases like endometriosis



## Healthy and Nutritious Fluids (Ambu)

When people speak of ambu, healthy fluids, such as plasma and lymph (*rasa*) and blood (*rakta*), usually come to mind. We can expand the definition of ambu to also encompass the nutrients themselves that nourish the male and female alike. These include hormones, specific vitamins and minerals, and *ojas* (the very essence of vitality and immunity).

**Table 3. Considerations for Healthy and Nutritious Fluids (Ambu)**

Optimal	Not Optimal
Strong plasma and lymph	Dehydration and dryness, palpitations, fever <sup>2</sup>
Strong blood	Anemia, fatigue and lack of energy, skin difficulties (such as eczema and psoriasis) <sup>3</sup>
Balanced hormones	Irregular menstrual cycles, strong acne during cycles
Proper nutrition, well-balanced diet with all essential vitamins and minerals	Diet with poor nutrients, frequent leftover or frozen foods, poor calcium and mineral intake (manifested as weak bones or frequent fractures)

### A Brief Look at Stress and Fertility

Let's pause and look specifically at stress, since it is intimately connected with all aspects of nutritious fluids. Stress can literally shut down the pituitary, the hormonal center of the brain that sends the first messengers to the ovaries so that ovulation occurs. Constant stimulation from cortisol, the stress hormone, puts the nervous system in a state of alert and panic, which has a very drying effect as well. The body ingeniously conserves its resources for the perceived threat and puts less vital functions, such as reproduction, on the back burner.

While more studies are needed, there is a growing body of research that increasingly links even more subtle stress levels with the ability to reproduce. Stress, trauma, and anxiety have been shown to affect fertility rates, as well as the quality and quantity of sperm and testosterone.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Further, there are accounts of women who previously had difficulties with conception suddenly conceiving after resolving stressful situations or healing past pain<sup>7</sup>

The bottom line here is to not forget stress in your approach to optimizing your fertility. Doing so can make all the difference in the world and can be incredibly healing on many levels.



## The Seed (Bija)

The seed, or bija, of fertility refers to the egg and sperm. According to Ayurveda, this reproductive tissue is the very last tissue in our bodies to be created. It is the **most refined, most complete tissue** after we digest and process all the food, thoughts, and emotions that we ingest. As such, its perfection requires the best of the best—the best food, the best thoughts, the best environment. This is especially true for men, since fully mature sperm are produced, on average, every two months. For women, maintaining a healthy environment protects the quality of the eggs that they were born with.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 4. Considerations for The Seed (Bija)**

Optimal	Not Optimal
Age 16–35 <sup>9</sup>	Extremely young or older age
Good eating and social habits	Tobacco use, excessive alcohol use, drug use, heavy pesticide exposure
Minimal environmental toxins	Heavy air pollution, heavy soil contamination

As you enhance the health of each of these factors, your fertility will begin to blossom. The following sections will walk you through a six-month preconception process and show you how each step enriches one or more of the four elements that we just addressed. **The first phase is a three-month cleanse period, followed by a three-month rejuvenation period. The culmination is conception.** Ideally, you should see an Ayurvedic practitioner before this process, as he or she may be able to home in on subtle imbalances or challenges that are specific to you.

## Steps to a New, Enriched State of Fertility

### 1. Cleanse (Months 1–3)

Before any growth or progress, a cleansing of the things that do not serve you well must occur. This is an opportunity to start new, on a blank slate, so that you can offer your highest self to the passage of pregnancy and to parenthood. Anger, grief, toxins, emotional heaviness, and more all have a profound impact on your pregnancy. In fertility cleansing, there is a specific effort to remove toxins and excess *doshas* from the field, the nutrients and fluid, and the seed, which are deeper tissue layers and therefore require deeper cleansing.





“Following panchakarma [Ayurvedic cleansing], a person’s perception and understanding become clear and the ego becomes mellow as love, compassion, and clarity unfold in the mind. The mind returns to its home, which is conscious awareness.”

— Dr. Vasant Lad<sup>10</sup>

## Emotional Cleansing

Allow these three months to give space for cleansing any past hurt or resentment in your relationship with your partner. Together, commit to purging the relationship of dysfunctional habits and beliefs so that your child enters a healthier, more supportive atmosphere. As you go deeper into the cleanse, do not be surprised if many things that were once long forgotten begin to resurface. For women, the womb is a very strong emotional center. A few tools for this process include the following:

- **Marriage counseling.** The preconception cleansing process needs support, and sometimes navigating through the emotions can be overwhelming. Having a neutral, yet compassionate, third party can help bring light to deep-seated pain or simply bring a perspective that is insightful and refreshing.



- **Daily sits.** Spend a few minutes reflecting on your relationship every day. Practice gratefulness for all that your partner gives you, and practice the art of genuine apology for any wrongdoings, being completely vulnerable and transparent with each other. You will see sincerity, trust, and compassion grow in your relationship from this practice.

## Spiritual Cleansing

This is also a time to cleanse yourself of any dysfunctionalities within—any anger, greed, attachment, or excess pride and ego. Release all expectations of life and of yourself and even any expectations that you may have of your future child.

- **Daily affirmation and prayer.** During these three months, strengthen your resolve to cleanse by beginning your day with the following affirmation:

I am free of any bondage from the past. I have the opportunity to be born new every moment, and I choose to release all forms of pain that keep me from being fully present. I forgive all those who have hurt me and ask for forgiveness from those whom I have hurt. Give me strength to cleanse and be free so that I may offer my highest self to the child that is to come.

- **Ashoka baths.** **Ashoka** is known as the “remover of sorrow,” and thus the herb heals both physical and psychological pain, particularly in the female reproductive tract. Boil three tablespoons of herbal powder in two cups of water until one cup of water remains. Add the decoction to a hot bath and soak in it. While in the bath, try to suck in the perineum to draw the herbal water and its effects close to the uterus.
- **Solarized water.** Men tend to hold pain in their heart center. It is said that the heart chakra vibrates at the same frequency as the color green, and thus drinking solarized green water with intention cleanses the heart chakra. Store filtered water in a green bottle and let the bottle sit in the sun for a day. As you drink the water, focus on your connection with all beings through the heart center.

## Physical Cleansing

The cleanse serves to clear toxins (ama) and excess doshas so that channels flow freely and toxins do not inhibit the proper functioning of any tissue. For an in-depth look at the logic behind cleansing and how to conduct a cleanse, read the [Ayurvedic Cleanse: Waste Be Gone!](#) e-book. Banyan Botanicals also has season-specific [cleanse guides](#) for the fall and spring. For the purpose of fertility, the same principles hold true. Traditional Ayurvedic cleansing for fertility lasts for several months in order to cleanse and revitalize the deepest tissue layers. Try your best to adhere to the following structure, allowing for flexibility and modifications as you need it:



- **Month 1: Gentle cleansing.** Eat an easy-to-digest diet that is well cooked. Completely eliminate—or at least avoid as much as possible—gluten, dairy, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. Follow the general guidelines in the e-book (aside from the monodiet), including the routine of self massage (*abhyanga*) and gentle yoga.
- **Month 2: More intense cleansing.** If a *panchakarma* center is accessible to you, then undergo panchakarma for a minimum of two weeks. Otherwise, two weeks to a month-long home cleanse with a monodiet of *kitchari* and cooked vegetables (to the best of your ability) will serve you well. During this time, women may target cleansing of the female reproductive tract by taking two tablets of *Women's Cycle Ease*, twice daily, with a tablespoon of organic aloe vera gel.
- **Month 3: Gentle cleansing.** Ease back into the routine of a more gentle cleanse, as in month 1.

Here are a few more tips for an effective fertility cleanse:

- Minimize, or if possible abstain, from intercourse. Yup, you read that right. This is a time of cleansing, which requires a lot of energy and reserves. Abstinence is a yogic practice used to conserve physical energy, ojas, and mental energy so that a more introspective and clear mind-set is maintained.
- Practice *meditation and yoga* regularly. Be sure to practice more gently while cleansing, particularly during month 2. Some suggestions include, but are not limited to, those in Table 5.

**Table 5. Yoga Practice During Your Fertility Cleanse**

Yoga	Breathing Exercises (Pranayama)
Slow and steady <i>moon salutations</i>	<i>Nadi shodhana</i>
Lion pose (Simhasana)	<i>Bhramari</i>
Seated twist (Ardha matsyendrasana)	Utgeet
Bound angle (Baddha konasana)	
Reclined hero (Supta virasana)	
<i>Corpse pose</i> (Savasana)	



- Calm your nerves. **Tranquil Mind** tablets are specially formulated for this purpose.
- Tend to your digestive fire (*agni*). Since this is a prolonged cleanse, keeping your digestive fire strong is very important. Take **Vata Digest**, **Pitta Digest**, or **Kapha Digest** tablets, depending on the strongest dosha that is out of balance in your **vikriti**.
- Keep the digestive system clear and regular with two tablets or a half-teaspoon of **Triphala powder** nightly.
- Manage your specific doshic needs.
  - **Vata**. Think about a more gentle cleanse. If you find yourself getting light-headed or weak after a prolonged period of time, then add more calories—with more ghee, root vegetables, and frequent meals as needed.
  - **Pitta**. If you have excess *pitta*, strongly consider **Blood Cleanse** (two tablets daily) to help cleanse the blood, a primary nutrient system for pregnancy.
  - **Kapha**. With excess accumulation and density in tissues, a tablet daily of **Triphala Guggulu**, for women, and **Gokshuradi Guggulu**, for men, may be a good supplement.

“Pregnancy is the ultimate call for rejuvenation.”

— Sebastian Pole<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Rejuvenation (Months 4–6)

Having pulled all the weeds, now it is time to make the land fertile with rich thoughts and nutrients. The intention of rejuvenation is ultimately to build ojas (the essence of vitality and immunity). Charaka, author of the most referenced ancient Ayurvedic text, explains the importance of ojas in relation to pregnancy: “It is the ojas which keeps all the living beings refreshed. There can be no life without ojas. Ojas marks the beginning of embryo.”<sup>12</sup> Whatever makes you feel more full, juicy, content, and nourished builds ojas.

### Emotional Rejuvenation

Rejuvenate your relationship with your partner through strong and powerful emotions of joy, love, and abundance. Author of the Ayurvedic textbook on obstetrics and gynecology, Dr. Tewari, writes, “Normalcy of psychology or happiness of couple is most important for conception.”<sup>13</sup> Spend this time giving to and nurturing each other and receiving the same gifts without hesitation. This is also a time to align yourselves in thought and spirit.

- **Write a letter.** Mark the beginning of rejuvenation with a letter that you write together to whatever higher power you believe in and the soul that you are inviting. With clarity, write your intention and ask for strength to fulfill your role as parents to its highest degree. Revisit the letter every week or so.
- **Weekly dates.** Make sure you spend time nurturing your relationship. Have fun and let joy flow. Keep communication open and also practice the art of listening.



## Spiritual Rejuvenation

This is a time to practice an intense amount of self-love. Do those things that your soul is calling for, whether it is spontaneously pulling to the side of the road to watch the sun set or making time to do your favorite hobby, because such things build ojas. Also remember that you are about to become an instrument for a new soul. Start to pour into yourself all that you want surrounding this baby.

- **Daily affirmation and prayer.** Continue the practice of daily affirmation but adapt it to this new phase of the fertility process.

I am complete, I am full.  
My existence is alive with love and abundance.  
I am strong, I am steady. I am here to serve.  
I am pure, I am giving. Grant me the  
strength to serve you, dear soul.

- **Journaling and reflection.** Journal your aspirations as a parent, dreams, and thoughts. Your fertile landscape is beginning to show its blooms.

## Physical Rejuvenation

The practices above will feed into the physical rejuvenation of the nutritious fluids, field, and seeds quite naturally. But there are additional practices that can certainly help. Take a look at the [rejuvenation guides](#) for diet, herbal, and lifestyle suggestions toward a successful rejuvenation.

Here are a few more tips specific to rejuvenation prior to conception:

- Surround yourself with things that symbolize fertility. Spend time as a couple with flowers and pleasant sounds and scenery, be around water, wear white, and spend ten minutes in the morning or late evening sitting in the sun.
- Engage in intercourse in moderation (and if possible, abstain until the sixth month). You want to build! During the sixth month you may begin intercourse at a frequency that is healthy for you to awaken the channels.
- Consider [Ashwagandha Bala Oil](#) for your self-oil massage (abhyanga) to bring strength to the body and all tissues. This will especially serve the woman well so that she has the necessary strength to carry her through pregnancy.



- Take herbs that will nourish the reproductive tract. **Women’s Cycle Nourish** is a blend of herbs that specifically nourishes the female reproductive tract, and likewise, **Men’s Support** targets the male reproductive tract. Alternatively, women may take a tablet or quarter teaspoon each of **Ashwagandha** and **Shatavari** and men may take a quarter teaspoon each of **Ashwagandha** and **Kapikacchu** (both mixed with a half teaspoon each of **ghee** and honey). And for everyone, preconception rejuvenation calls for **Chyavanprash**, one teaspoon every morning with a glass of warm milk.
- Be mindful of your digestive fire. Rejuvenative herbs and foods are quite heavy as they are building, so tend to your digestive fire with the same recommendations from the cleanse section.
- Build the plasma and blood. These are the life-giving and nutrient-giving tissues of your body, so much so that the blood volume increases by 50 percent during pregnancy. Ensure plenty of hydration, foods rich in nutrients, and, for women, supplementation with calcium, iron, vitamin B12, and folic acid. An organic multivitamin is the easiest source.
- Maintain a regular yoga practice. In addition to the same poses used in the cleanse phase, you may also consider those in Table 6.

**Table 6. Yoga Practice During Your Fertility Rejuvenation**

Yoga	Breathing Exercises (Pranayama)
Moon (female) and sun (male) salutations (bring union of these energies as a couple)	Kapalabhati
Extended side angle (Utthita parsvakonasana)	Nadi shodhana
Wide-legged forward bend (Prasarita padottanasana)	Bhramari
Boat pose (Naukasana)	Ujjayi
Cow face pose (Gomukhasana)	
Maha mudra	





“Self-awareness is the ultimate goal of sexuality, knowing your God-like Divine Self. Merge with your entire Being..your Universal You..”

— Unknown

### 3. Conception

The time for conception has finally arrived! It is now all about timing. Most couples jump into this phase with their eyes fixated on only one thing—getting pregnant. But do not forget the emotional and spiritual components. Make intercourse about offering the best of each of you, as if it is a ceremony. Spiritually, remember that you are just instruments for this soul to come into the world. Be patient—the soul will come when both you and the soul are ready. Do your best not to become frustrated, remembering the impact of stress and anxiety on your fertility.

#### Timing

There are numerous kits, phone apps, and devices out there to help you identify when ovulation occurs. The general idea is that a woman ovulates mid-cycle (approximately fourteen days prior to menstruation). Consider having intercourse every other day, beginning five days prior to ovulation and ending a couple of days after ovulation (the sperm survives five days within the female tract and the ovum survives one or two days).



Having intercourse daily on the days immediately surrounding ovulation may prove beneficial. To determine when you are ovulating, use whatever technique best suits you; the [Mayo Clinic's](#) website discusses some of the possibilities.

## Ayurvedic Suggestions

Ayurveda has several suggestions that all serve to retain the sanctity of sex and replenish ojas, which is released during intercourse.

- Continue to replenish ojas through diet and lifestyle, while making sure your digestive fire remains strong.
- Create a peaceful, loving, and welcoming atmosphere. Visualize your desired child, enter the practice in a meditative state, light incense, and use essential oils, such as rose or honeysuckle.
- Practice intercourse with the woman's face upward.
- Respect intercourse as a form of mutual love and respect; avoid violent sexual practices.
- After intercourse, bathe and then drink a glass of warm milk boiled with a pinch each of cardamom, saffron, ginger, and ground almond powder; saffron is particularly nourishing to the reproductive tract and ojas.
- After the fertile window, conserve your ojas if fertilization is not successful by avoiding intercourse until the next fertile window, particularly if you have high vata or a weaker constitution.

## Embrace the Process

Above all, embrace the process and trust your instincts. Because this time in a couple's life is so loaded with dreams, expectations, and ideals of how things ought to be, far too often many overthink the whole thing. Remember that this is a natural process. Even with a plan such as the one recommended in this guide, allow for spontaneity and let the process unfold organically.

By the end of reading this guide, we hope that you feel empowered as a couple—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. If you encounter significant problems that are not amenable to the recommendations above, then see an Ayurvedic practitioner. Ayurveda has remarkable tools that can help assist you in completing your family.



## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Vasant D. Lad, *Textbook of Ayurveda: A Complete Guide to Clinical Assessment, Volume 2* (Albuquerque, NM: The Ayurvedic Press, 2006), 239-43.
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- <sup>4</sup> Ginny L. Ryan et al., "Voluntary and Involuntary Childlessness in Female Veterans: Associations with Sexual Assault," *Fertility and Sterility* 102, no. 2 (August 2014): 539-47.
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- <sup>7</sup> Christiane Northrup, *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom: Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 419-23.
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- <sup>11</sup> Sebastian Pole, "Getting Pregnant the Ayurvedic Way," accessed November 27, 2014, <http://www.sebastianpole.com/articles/Getting-Pregnant-the-Ayurvedic-Way.html>.
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- <sup>13</sup> P. V. Tewari, *Ayurvediya Prasuti-Tantra Evam Stri-Roga* (Varanasi, India: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1986), 74.

