

A pregnant woman with dark curly hair, wearing a purple dress, is shown from the side. She is holding a bright green apple against her bare pregnant belly. The background is white, and there is a green vertical bar on the left side of the image.

I Want a Healthy Pregnancy

**A Nutritionist's
Guide to a
Natural and
Vibrant Pregnancy**

Alia Almoayed

I Want a Healthy Pregnancy

by Alia Almoayed

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Disclaimer: The advice and information provided in this book reflects the author's personal experience and is intended as a general guideline for health and wellbeing during pregnancy. It is not intended to replace the advice and care of a healthcare provider. Eating and lifestyle may need to be adapted and individualised according to each person. Always seek the advice of a qualified health expert for all your pregnancy-related matters.

The masculine pronoun 'he' has been used throughout the book to refer to a baby. This has been done for simplification purposes, and because in Arabic the general reference to the unborn child is masculine. The information in this book applies to male and female babies equally.

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Chapter 1

I Want to Get Pregnant !

Maximising your fertility

Alia's Pregnancy Journal Entry:

"Should we have a baby? I would love to but I don't know if my body is ready to go through another pregnancy. I even forgot what it's like to have a baby, it's been a while! Am I fertile enough; how will my body handle it; whom will the baby look like; will I be a good mother... So many questions!"

It's very natural to have all kinds of questions and thoughts when you're planning for a baby. As you can see from my journal entry, each of my babies came with its own set of questions. Having a baby is fun, tiring, and unpredictable all at the same time; and let me tell you, it is still all that with each new pregnancy.

I've had a lot of women tell me that they're putting off getting pregnant because they are not sure if 'it's the right time'. To be honest, having a baby is such a big decision that there will never be a perfect time to do it.

I absolutely love it when a woman comes to me and tells me that she's planning to have a baby in 6-12 months time and wants to know what she can do until then to improve her chances of getting pregnant and having a healthy pregnancy and baby.

If you're considering getting pregnant, please remember that it's not just your health during pregnancy that counts, but your health **BEFORE** conception makes a big difference as well. For women, it takes a month to form an egg, so everything you do during that month will affect your chances and the quality of your offspring. For men, it's even longer than that. It takes about four months for sperm to form and be ready to fertilise, so for men, it's not just about what they're eating today, it's actually about everything that they've been doing for the past four

months!

Of course, I'm sure you also know that your overall health matters, not just the time it takes to create an egg or a sperm. Many of the women I see spend their whole teenage years destroying their bodies with fizzy drink, caffeine and cigarettes, and then regret it when they realise that their bodies will not allow them to have babies later on because of it. And the same applies to men of course. Nature will always do its best to ensure only healthy babies come into the world. And healthy babies cannot grow in unhealthy bodies.

So, ideally, you should start thinking about how to improve your diet and lifestyle at least six months before you get pregnant. But if you don't have that long and you want to get pregnant NOW, you can still benefit from the tips I have for you. These are the tips I used for myself, and they really made a difference. They will help you boost your fertility, and hopefully ensure that you have a healthy and hassle-free pregnancy, and a super baby!

Where to start

Before you do anything else, stand back and take an honest look at your body and your health. Keep the following in mind:

- If you are overweight or underweight, now is a good time to address either. Of course, you should not go on a strict diet if you want to get pregnant next month. If you are very overweight or very underweight, it might be worth considering a delay in conception until your body is at a more optimum weight. A healthy-eating approach to weight loss or weight gain is always more beneficial than quick fixes
- Make sure to take out any form of toxins (see [Chapter 14](#) for more details). Toxins, such as mercury fillings or pesticides, can cross the placenta when you're pregnant and affect your baby. They can also hinder your chances of getting pregnant. If you have at least six months before your planned conception, it might be worth it to also consider a detox. Always do a supervised detox with a qualified practitioner; do not attempt one on your own
- If you are on the contraceptive Pill, stop it as soon as you can and allow at least three months before you start trying for a baby. This gives your body a chance to get rid of the hormones accumulated while on the Pill. Of course, you have to consider other forms of contraception while you're waiting for your body to clear out

- If you already have another child, it's good to keep a gap between your babies of at least 18 months before you get pregnant again. This allows your body enough time to recover from the first pregnancy and birth and to replenish all the necessary nutrients
- Keep your nutrient levels in top shape. You will need all your nutrients now to make sure your reproductive system is in excellent condition. Make sure you're getting enough zinc (from seafood, rye, oats, and nuts), B vitamins (from whole grains and greens) and vitamin C to boost your fertility. Also, top up on your essential fats, especially omega 3 from raw nuts and seeds. (See more in [Chapter 11](#))
- Take a good quality pre-natal multivitamin supplement and consider taking a high omega oils supplement such as Udo's oil
- Don't forget to stop all harmful habits such as alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes. Those are sure to affect your fertility and your baby when you're pregnant. Research has shown that as little as one cup of coffee a day can reduce your fertility by half

Balancing hormones

The most important thing you should do before you get pregnant is make sure your hormones are balanced. When you have hormone havoc going on inside you, it will be harder for your body to get pregnant or have a good pregnancy.

And guess what is the biggest factor in hormone imbalance. Sugar!

Cut out added sugar from your diet (see [Chapter 9](#)) and make sure to also implement all the steps that will help you achieve maximum blood sugar balance. This will make a big difference to your cycle and the quality of the egg you produce.

Should you delay?

If you feel that your diet and your health are in too much of a mess at the moment, it might be worth it to delay for a couple of months just to make sure everything is in order. I know you may be very keen on having a baby, but remember that you want to give this baby the best chance in life. The health of your baby starts way before conception. Trust me, it will be worth your efforts.

Get your partner on board

If your partner thinks that the burden of making a healthy baby depends solely on the mother, then he's very wrong. If he doesn't believe you, then please show him this chapter.

After all, your baby will be 50% from his father! So your partner's health before conception is crucial to the baby's health and also to your chances of fertility. In many cultures, infertility is blamed entirely on the female while it has been established that about 60% of infertility cases are traced back to the man.

So, all the tips in this chapter and this book also apply to him. If more fathers took a more active role in improving their health before conception, we would have a much healthier generation to come.

Having said that, many men are eager to help out but just don't know what to do (other than the obvious act of fertilisation of course). If you let your partner know his role in this baby's life, I'm sure he will be more than happy to help. Just remind him that his health initiative should ideally start at least four to six months before your planned conception.

Time it right

If you now feel that your body is ready (or as ready as it will be at least), then you can start trying to conceive.

To maximise your chances of fertility, it is best to have sex five days before and after the estimated ovulation. Women ovulate on average on day 14 of their cycle. There are plenty of websites that can help you determine your ovulation days. If you still can't figure it out, you can also get an ovulation kit, sold at many chemists.

Timing it right makes a big difference to your chances of getting pregnant, because women are only fertile for about 24 hours. The good news is that most sperm survive for up to three days (some even five days).

And don't forget to jot down the date of the first day of your monthly period because if you get pregnant everyone will ask you for that date!

How long should it take?

This, of course, is not a question that I can answer. I know many women who have fallen pregnant from the first attempt, while others needed a few months to achieve the task.

Your fertility will depend on your health, your age, your body type, your ovulation, your partner's health and many other factors.

The worst thing you can do is wait and stress about it. I remember having to wait 2 weeks to take a pregnancy test; they felt like the longest two weeks of my life!

Stress of any kind reduces fertility because when you're stressed all your energy will be diverted to your 'fight or flight' mechanism and your body will not be able to focus on reproduction. Whether you're stressed about getting pregnant, not getting pregnant, or anything else, you must make sure to find ways to relax.

If your conception attempts are still not giving you results, you might just need time. Remember that age has a lot to do with it. It is said that a 35-year-old woman takes on average twice as long to conceive as a 25-year-old woman. And a man's sperm quality is also reduced after age 24.

Other conditions that might be delaying your fertility include polycystic ovaries (PCOs), fibroids, endometriosis, or an infection. Check with your health care provider if you are concerned, or visit a nutritionist for a full health plan to boost your chances and help you during your pregnancy.

Once you're pregnant, refer to the rest of this book as a guide.

Chapter 2

I Can't Stand The Smell Of My Living Room

Dealing with morning sickness

Alia's Journal Entry, Pregnancy Week 9:

"I'm feeling a lot more nauseous this week. All smells are magnified and certain smells make my stomach turn, namely the smell of heavy cooking (spices, onions, etc.) and the smell of second-hand smoke. My nose and taste buds are in charge now. Ugh"

I've heard horror stories about pregnant women and morning sickness. There was this lady who couldn't stand the smell of her husband in the first few months of pregnancy. It got so bad for her that she would start getting nauseous as she drove towards their house. Needless to say, she spent many days at her mother's house until things 'calmed down.'

Another lady couldn't stand the smell of her fridge! She would open the fridge to find something to eat and then run to the toilet to throw up. There was something about the smell she got when she opened the fridge that she couldn't stand (and it was a clean fridge that she had been fine with before pregnancy!).

I used to hear all these stories and think that they are really strange. Does the sense of smell really change when you get pregnant? It can't be!

When I got pregnant, I found out the hard way. During my first pregnancy, everything that was happening to my body was like watching an 8th grade science project. I took the pregnancy test and waited for the changes to come along. But instead of seeing the changes to my

expanding belly, I was first experiencing them in other ways.

The exhaustion and the strong sense of smell were the first things that struck me. I'll talk about the exhaustion later; but as for the sense of smell, all I can say is 'wow!' My sense of smell had magnified several times over and it was a really strange experience. All of a sudden, a normal day-to-day smell was becoming unbearable and I found myself avoiding smoky restaurants, asking my husband not to use perfume and even holding my breath when I walked next to a diesel bus!

This was all happening in the first 16 weeks of pregnancy. At one point, well into my third pregnancy, I left the bedroom and walked into our living room. I got a strong whiff of orange. The orange smell was so powerful that I thought somebody had used an orange-scented air freshener. I tried to follow the smell but could not pin point it. Then, as I was checking my kids' lunch boxes, I realised my son had put a few slices of orange in his school lunch box.

Why does our sense of smell get stronger during pregnancy? Probably as a survival mechanism so that the mother can sense danger before it gets too close. In fact, all senses are heightened during pregnancy.

What does the smell trigger in you?

For many pregnant women, smells trigger nausea and/or vomiting. Sometimes, even the thought of certain foods or smells triggers nausea and/or vomiting. For me, it was a bit milder. I thankfully had no vomiting at all in any of my pregnancies, but my sense of smell did make me nauseous at times. I think it's nature's way of making you avoid toxins and toxic fumes to protect your unborn child.

With this pregnancy, I started to notice that my nausea would come on when I sat in the living room. But because that was the room I hung out in most of the time, I didn't make the connection until much later. I would be fine in the bedroom and then start to feel funny as soon as I walked into the living room. How strange! Nothing had changed in that room, it was purely my reaction to the smells that came to me while I was there.

So what did the smell trigger for me? My initial reaction to strong scents was avoidance. I even noticed that with one of my clothes cabinets, I started smelling the paint (which was applied 6 years ago!) So I started avoiding that particular cabinet or holding my breath when I opened it.

Having a strong sense of smell to me meant more chances to get nauseous. I tried to get as much fresh air as possible. Not only did I feel nauseous from these smells, but in many instances, I was also put off eating for that reason. Everything that I smelled or ate had to be 'approved' by my smell and taste buds, which were being very picky at that point.

How to deal with it

Needless to say, every pregnancy is different, and what worked for me might not necessarily work for you. But I'll tell you anyway. These things helped me and many other women dealing with the uncomfortable first stages of pregnancy and nausea.

- Do not leave your stomach empty. I found that when my stomach was empty, I was a lot more likely to feel nauseous. So have frequent healthy snacks throughout the day. The common advice you hear is to munch on dry crackers. This is good (assuming the crackers are made with whole grains), but most other healthy snacks will also work such as raw nuts, fruits, or a simple cucumber
- Try ginger. Steep ginger in hot water and sip it; add it to your meal, or even just sniff it for comfort. Just don't overdo the ginger in early pregnancy as it is very powerful and may trigger miscarriage
- Eat dates. Dates saved my life when I was pregnant. I used to grab a few in my handbag to snack on while driving or when I knew I wouldn't have access to any meals or snacks. Some dates come pre-wrapped individually, which makes them ideal for the handbag. It's also better if you get the ones that are stuffed with raw nuts
- Try to find the taste that your body is looking for. For example, if you feel like eating something savoury, do not grab a chocolate. Getting sugar when your body wanted salt might make you more prone to feeling uneasy
- Avoid strong smells and odours. For me, it helped to avoid smoky areas and to stop using any form of perfume or house cleaning items (see more in [Chapter 14](#)). Think of it as your body's natural attempt at a detox
- Sleep on your left side (to keep the stomach low) to avoid the stomach juices from washing upwards. It also helps to prop yourself up in bed (e.g. on two pillows)
- Try to avoid letting yourself get too tired. My nausea always got worse

towards the end of the day, when my body was getting more tired.
Taking short naps in the day helped

- Get regular light exercise. I know you might not feel like it at that stage, but it really helps! (More on this in [Chapter 13](#))
- Keep your meal size small. The bigger the meal, the more likely you'll feel nauseous and get heartburn afterwards. Eat regular meals, but keep the quantity small

Chapter 3

Why Am I So Tired?

Re-claiming your energy

Alia's Journal Entry, Pregnancy Week 6/7:

"I can't believe how tired I am. I had to come home early from work every day this week and I've been sleeping early every night. All I can think of is my bed. Why am I becoming such a zombie!"

When a pregnant woman tells you she's tired, it's not the normal 'tired'. Tiredness during pregnancy is real. Before I got pregnant, I used to read about fatigue during pregnancy and I almost expected it; but it was only when I got pregnant that I understood it. And now I truly sympathise with any tired pregnant woman.

Pregnancy fatigue hit me early on in my pregnancies. At around 6 weeks of pregnancy, something happens and you start to shut down. The body is obviously working very hard on the inside to create a baby and a placenta so it leaves the mother washed out.

If I were to compare this fatigue to anything, I would say it's very similar to the exhaustion I felt during my college history class when I would go to class after pulling an all-nighter. It's a deep exhaustion that runs through your whole body and makes everything irrelevant - except sleep!

With my second pregnancy, exhaustion was the first hint that made me take a pregnancy test. I was a very hands-on mother to my then 1-year-old daughter and I used to do everything with her. Then, one day, I was so tired that I remember thinking of nothing else but the bed. It was 11am when I floated to the room, shut the door, and crashed for the next three hours, not knowing (or caring) about anything else that was happening in the house.

That episode of exhaustion made a lot more sense once I found out I was pregnant. It was also followed by many other similar episodes of tiredness. And since then, I've heard many funny stories about other pregnant women who were in the same boat.

One of my friends spent half her working day with her head buried in her arms in deep sleep on her office desk. Another woman started sleeping in the cinema and even snoring sometimes (according to her husband). Others report being so tired, even at the wheel while driving, which can be very dangerous.

So why do we get so tired?

This is a question that might be on the minds of many patient husbands who adjust to life with a sleepy partner for a big part of the pregnancy. For the on-looker, the fatigue doesn't always make sense and saying things like "maybe if you go out more, you'll get your energy back" will not help at all.

While I was writing this book, I thought I'd get some first-hand research. Since I was pregnant myself, I asked my husband how his life changes when his partner slows down during pregnancy. I was very curious to know what things are like from the other perspective.

Unfortunately, my research was not very satisfying. My husband said that he would refrain from answering that question and that we could "discuss it after the baby is born to avoid any arguments." So I guess that's one way of dealing with it. Partners may feel like they're treading on thin ice when the woman is pregnant, I don't know. But frankly, it's we women who have to deal with the pain, the exhaustion, the birth, and the sleepless nights (most of the time at least) so a little inconvenience for the partner won't be the end of the world.

The reason why pregnant women get tired is simple; your body needs to pump more blood to a growing foetus and placenta, which leaves very little for the mother herself. As a result, the mother feels worn out and exhausted. For many women, however, that tiredness gets better once the placenta is fully formed and can function on its own (usually at around 12-16 weeks of pregnancy).

Also, your tiredness can be triggered by uncomfortable sleep. When I was pregnant, my sleep quality deteriorated. Each stage of pregnancy came with a different cause of disrupted sleep. It was either nausea, heartburn,

bad dreams, worries, not being able to sleep on my stomach, or even the baby getting excited and kicking while I was trying to sleep! You'll get your sleep back of course, but not for now. For most pregnant women, sound sleep comes way after the baby is born, once they put the baby on a good sleeping routine (see my suggested reading at the end of the book). Until that happens, however, hold on to the precious sleep that you're now getting, however little it is.

Until it gets better, what can you do?

If you imagine having an exhausting week at work; you can't wait for the weekend to relax. Now imagine that this exhausting week does not end; it goes on for weeks and weeks and you're the only one feeling the effects. That's how it feels to be pregnant and tired. You feel like your days become a struggle for energy. There's so much you want to do but you just can't get yourself to do it! For me, it was difficult to see all my plans put on hold or delayed while I just slumped on the sofa and stared, waiting for my energy to come back. My productivity was significantly reduced and I saw myself go from 'super-mom' to 'super-slow-mom'!

How I made the exhaustion more tolerable

In order to remember how to make things better, you have to first think of why they're happening in the first place. Here are a few hints on how you should think:

You're tired because your blood circulation is redirecting to the growing baby, therefore the iron that usually carries oxygen around in your blood is in short supply.

The solution: have more iron-rich foods! Iron is abundant in dark leafy green vegetables, so the more salads and greens you eat the better. It's also in lean meats; and do choose organic meats whenever possible (unless you are vegetarian).

If your blood tests show that you are low in iron then your doctor might recommend iron supplements to help you out. Just remember that iron is better absorbed if it comes from a natural, plant-based source and if it is taken with vitamin C, so add some lemon to your salad for example or have your iron supplements with orange juice.

You're tired because your body is creating a new life and that is a complicated process. So maybe you just need to give yourself a break

and give in a little to these exhaustion episodes. Your tiredness is your body's way of letting you know that you need to slow down. So instead of telling you that there's a magic potion for feeling energetic during pregnancy, what I will tell you is that pregnancy is your best excuse to rest and sleep! And trust me, you'll miss those sleeping days when you have a screaming baby on your hands.

Diet and lifestyle energy tips:

You'll hate me for this one, but I will say it anyway. The best remedy for exhaustion is exercise. When I say that to pregnant women, they usually give me the 'are you kidding me' look; but I'm not kidding. I know that you're very tired and can barely move, but if you can get yourself into a light exercise routine, you'll feel much better.

Exercise and movement improve circulation, uplift mood, and remind you that you're alive! Oh, and if you think that this point contradicts the previous one about resting, welcome to pregnancy! Yes, you'll need to get both rest and exercise.

Get some natural light. You'd be amazed how much energy you can get just by sitting for a few minutes in the sun. Getting some natural light will give you a physical and emotional boost and, of course, a bit of the marvellous vitamin D that we all need!

Watch what you eat. If you're going through a tiredness phase of pregnancy, then your diet is the first place you should look. Sometimes when we're tired, the last thing we want to bother with is finding healthy food; but let me tell you this: if there was ever a time that you need to watch what you eat, it's now. Look at the box to get a general idea.

Energy Robbers	Energy Boosters
Refined white foods such as white bread, pastries, white rice, etc.	Whole grains (brown rice, etc.)
Sugar and sweets	Fresh fruits, dates or raw honey
Stimulants and caffeine	Water and diluted fresh juice
Smoke and other toxins	Protein such as beans and raw nuts
Skipping meals	Regular meals throughout the day
Sedentary lifestyle (couch potato)	Regular exercise
	Natural light

Avoid the stimulants. No matter how tired you are, reaching for your

favourite coffee concoction is bad news. Caffeine in any form (coffee, tea, chocolate, or fizzy/energy drinks) will give you a temporary high followed by a harsh slump that will leave you more tired than you started off.

Also there's a big debate over the effects of caffeine on pregnancy, with some research even showing that each cup of coffee increases the chances of miscarriage by 50%. Caffeine also interferes with the absorption of some minerals such as calcium, magnesium and zinc, which are crucial during pregnancy. So, instead of aiming for a 'quick fix' try to look for permanent solutions that not only give you energy but nutrients to make a healthy baby.

Keep snacks handy. There's nothing better than a quick energy booster when you're starting to feel tired. Some snacks that saved me from exhaustion a few times were: dates (stuffed with raw nuts), a handful of raw nuts, an apple, carrot sticks, olives, raisins, or goji berries. And you can keep any of these in your handbag for easy access. Healthy snacking has helped me avoid resorting to more unhealthy options especially when I'm out and about.

Instant energy boost

Alia's Journal Entry, Pregnancy Week 12:

"I'm so tired these days. Sometimes I'm even too tired to think of what to eat. I drag myself to the kitchen and stare into the fridge looking for an energy booster."

Don't do what I did. I kind of had to learn the hard way. By my third pregnancy, I realised that I had to catch exhaustion before it caught me. Here are a few ideas on what you can eat for quick energy:

- A salad with some protein (e.g. beans or chicken)
- Fresh fruit smoothie (make sure to throw in some seeds and nuts as well)
- Healthy shake: in the blender, blend a banana with some rice milk or almond milk and add a spoon or two of oats plus a handful of walnuts and a sprinkle of cinnamon
- Healthy snacks (as discussed earlier): dates (stuffed with raw nuts), a handful of raw nuts, an apple, carrot sticks, olives, raisins, or goji berries

When will your energy come back?

This was the question that I was thinking about all the time during the first part of my pregnancies. When will my energy come back?

Sometimes, although I had heard and read about how 'it gets better', some part of me still couldn't believe it would happen.

But I'm happy to report that for the majority of women, energy does come back sometime in the second trimester. Mine started to improve around week 15 of pregnancy and got much better around week 17. Of course the last few weeks of pregnancy are tiring because you're just very heavy (especially if you have put on a lot of excess weight).

Pregnancy is a time when your body is doing a lot of work internally, so don't expect to be 100% energetic. It's very normal to be functioning at a little less than usual and it's always wise to take regular rest and pampering. Pushing yourself will not help you or the baby.

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