



Holiday Preconception Prep

Tips for Avoiding the Top 3 Seasonal Fertility Traps

By Kim Seidel

Yikes! The holiday season is upon us. For women who are trying to conceive, it's a very stressful time, especially if they have been trying to conceive for an extended period. The emphasis on family and children around the holidays can be particularly difficult to handle.

Women trying to conceive can learn to deal gracefully with three common fertility traps – food, drink and family stress.

Trap No. 1: The Food

The prevalence of fatty, high-calorie foods can cause undue stress, especially to the woman trying to lose weight or avoid gaining weight to restore, increase or not inhibit her fertility. Fortunately, you can confront nutritional sabotage, including the tempting holiday buffet.

The most sensible strategy for eating moderately at holiday parties and other events is to eat before you go, says Marie Davidson, a clinical psychologist at the Fertility Centers of Illinois in Chicago. "Have a nutritious snack, such as peanut butter on whole wheat bread, and a glass of skim milk a half hour before you leave. Then you won't be ravenous."

At the party, use "weight-watcher" tricks, Davidson says. These tricks include putting small portions of the offerings on your plate, and focusing on greens, veggies, grains and some protein.

"It is the holidays, so you shouldn't deprive yourself," Davidson says. "It's more about balance, which allows you some dessert, so you can have that too. If you control amounts, you won't be overeating."

Eat your food slowly and with appreciative attention. "If you are combining eating with having conversation, so much the better; it will slow you down," Davidson says. Foods to skip include chips, dips, cream sauces and gravies – a little gravy won't hurt – and seconds.



"It's also a good idea to familiarize yourself with fertility-friendly foods, since these can actually be 'hiding' in a typical holiday array," says Beth Heller, a former fertility patient and co-founder/co-director of Pulling Down the Moon, specialists in holistic fertility care in Chicago.

Broccoli and cauliflower on the vegetable platter, for instance, contain compounds that help to detoxify the body and balance hormones. Almonds and other nuts – skip the milk-chocolate-covered ones – contain healthy fats, Heller says. When eaten in moderation, nuts help to stabilize blood sugar.

Hummus dip, which contains sesame paste and chick peas, is a good source of healthy fats and fiber. "If you absolutely have to have a sweet snack, look for the berries on the fruit plate and indulge in a tiny piece of dark chocolate, both a source of antioxidants," Heller says. "As always, education and moderation is the key."

In general, stay more than six feet away from the buffet table, says Uche Odiatu, a certified personal trainer in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Physically being farther away makes it more challenging for you to mindlessly eat to excess.

"Crave the conversation more than the food," says Odiatu, co-author of *The Miracle of Health: Simple Solutions Extraordinary Results* (John Wiley & Sons, Jan. 2009). "Focus on the relationships you want to build, mend and grow during a party, and you will find your attention moving toward connecting with people vs. the holiday 'cheese ball and crackers.'"

A former fertility patient, Mary Williams of Berwyn, Ill., followed the experts by eating something nutritious before holiday events. "Then at the party, I ate something small so not to offend the host," she says. "I usually allowed myself one small piece of something I enjoy, such as a cookie or a small pie slice, just as a reward."

Williams avoided the buffet lines at all costs, even if she ordered off the menu instead. "There's no way to monitor plateful after plateful of food," she says.

Trap No. 2: The Alcohol



How much is too much when it comes to alcohol, and is it OK to imbibe when you're trying to conceive?

"When attempting conception, alcohol intake should be limited to the equivalent of one glass per day," says Dr. Kevin Lederer, president of Fertility Centers of Illinois. "You should not drink during pregnancy, since the safe limit for pregnant women is unknown."

Yet, along with all of the food, alcohol is all around during the holidays. "If you don't drink, and people know this, there likely won't be any pressure," says Amy Levine, certified sexuality educator and

founder of sexedsolutions.com in New York. "But, if you're typically a drinker and you want to keep mum about trying to be a mommy-to-be, fake a cocktail. The bar at any party is sure to be stocked with mixers, like juice and soda. Pass orange juice off for a screwdriver, or soda with a lime as a rum and Coke."

Williams says she didn't feel bad for toasting with water, which can be put in a champagne glass. "I often put bottled water in a wine glass just because the glass association for me is relaxing," she says. "To me, there's no harm in just saying 'no,' or 'I'm not interested in drinking.'"

Here are other tips to sidestep the alcohol trap:

- Always keep a healthy drink in your hand to toast with instead, says Paulette Kouffman Sherman, a psychologist and dating coach in Manhattan, N.Y. "A seltzer with lime can look like an alcoholic drink anyways," she says. "Consider this a dry run for pregnancy, and remember that having your baby is the most important thing."
- If anyone tries to pressure you, tell them you're high on life, Sherman says. "If you receive outside pressure to drink, you can make a joke to deflect it and say, 'Wow, I thought that type of peer pressure stopped at 21.' Remember that you are responsible for doing what is good for you – and your future baby. No one else can make those choices for you."

Trap No. 3: The Family

It's a difficult trap, because families typically have traditions for the holidays, Davidson says. Yet these times are child-centered, and that can be "very painful" for the couple longing to have a child and working on it, she says.

"It's totally OK to miss events that are going to bring you down," Williams says. "I don't think it's healthy to put yourself into a situation that you know will be negative, even if it's a holiday celebration. Start a new tradition if needed. Avoid situations or people that pull down your energy."

You can opt out of family gatherings, either by going away together as a couple or limiting the family time, Davidson says. You also can consider staying at a hotel so you have an escape zone, she says.

Prepare responses to those anticipated questions: "Any news? Are you ever going to have a baby? Time is passing; you don't have forever."

One approach is to be "kind but firm," Davidson says. Responses could go something like: "We love that you care about me, but I'm not comfortable talking about that, especially now when I just want to enjoy the holidays with you."



"Play around with things to say, write them on 3-by-5 cards and bring them with you," Davidson says. "Above all, do your best to enjoy the spirit of the season. If you think you need more help, get it."