

Beyond Diet: Fertility Herbs and Vitamins

Chastetree Berry

The most important supplement to take for infertility is the excellent women's hormone-balancing herb chastetree berry. Although most chastetree berry studies have been on women's health issues other than infertility (it is the best answer in the world for PMS), several of them have also been struck by the power of that herb to help infertile women conceive¹⁷. In the most recent study, sixty-six women who had been unsuccessful in becoming pregnant for one to three years were given either a combination formula featuring chastetree berry or a placebo. Ten became pregnant while using the chastetree berry compared to half as many who were getting the placebo¹⁸.

Chastetree berry may be especially effective when the infertility is related to a luteal-phase defect and elevated prolactin. Luteal-phase defect can cause infertility because a lack of the hormone progesterone prevents the uterine lining from developing properly. Two uncontrolled studies have confirmed chastetree berry's fertility power over luteal-phase defect. Combined, they looked at forty-five infertile women who had low progesterone levels. By the end of the three-month study, the herb had been successful in thirty-nine of the women. Twenty-five of them had normal progesterone levels, seven more tended toward normal, and—here is the big news—seven of them became pregnant¹⁹.

In addition to chastetree berry, vitamin C can help women with this condition become pregnant; 750 mg of vitamin C a day helped 25% of women with luteal-phase defect become pregnant compared to only 11% of women who did not take vitamin C²⁰.

More Herbal Help

Though chastetree berry is the most important single herb for infertility, there are several other herbs, often taken in combinations that include chastetree berry, which can gently ease a woman's body back to fertility.

When the origins of infertility are hormonal, as they most often are, dong quai, red clover, licorice, wild yam, and squawvine are helpful along with the chastetree berry. Herbalist Kathi Keville says that several studies done in

China have shown that dong quai helps the ovaries function better and helps re-establish a normal cycle and fertility. If you are using dong quai, don't use it while you are menstruating.

Herbs such as valerian are often used for relaxing. Herbalist Amanda McQuade Crawford says that the calming herb skullcap is a reproductive relaxant that is really good for enhancing fertility. In Linda's clinic, relaxing herbs are almost always given for fertility because stress plays such a huge role—some say one of the biggest. We all know that when a woman has been trying for a long time to get pregnant, she feels a great deal of pressure. Many, unfortunately, even feel like failures if they cannot conceive. It is often the case that when a woman stops trying and decides to adopt, and the pressure is suddenly off, then, like magic, she conceives.

Herbs that support the liver and help to detoxify and to get rid of excess estrogen in the body that can interfere with fertility are a good idea. Dandelion root, burdock root, and Oregon grape root are among those used, as are herbs that increase circulation to the pelvic area, such as prickly ash, ginger, and dong quai. Linda particularly likes to use false unicorn for weak uteruses that are having trouble holding the fertilized egg. Even immunity herbs such as astragalus are used to improve immune function, which can be important in infertility. Yarrow is a great fertility herb when infection is part of the problem, since it is an antimicrobial herb with a special affinity to the reproductive tract.

Ho shou wu is a herb that strengthens the whole system and is used to increase fertility even in older men and women. Red raspberry and alfalfa are also very good nourishing tonics. And, of course, ginseng, the king of herbs, is excellent for increasing vigour and sexual energy, and, when taken regularly, is a great help for infertility.

Traditional herbalists usually use combinations of herbs instead of single herbs so that the different actions of the herbs can act synergistically. One of our favourite herbalists, Rosemary Gladstar, recommends the following two formulae for female infertility:

Fertility Tonic

- 4 parts rehmannia
- 1 part astragalus
- 1 part dong quai
- 2 parts false unicorn root
- 3 parts wild yam
- 1 part chastetree berry

This formula is taken as a capsule or tincture three times a day. If you've never heard of rehmannia before, you're not alone. But this little-known herb is also referred to by another one of our favourite herbalists, Michael Tierra, as an important herb used for female infertility in Chinese herbalism. False unicorn root, another strange-sounding herb in this formula, has a long tradition of use for the female reproductive system, including being used by early North American medical healers for infertility.

Female Fertility Tea

- 3 parts wild yam
- 2 parts licorice
- 4 parts sassafras bark or root
- 1 part chastetree berry
- ½ part dong quai
- 1 part ginger
- 1 part cinnamon
- ½ part false unicorn root
- ¼ part orange peel
- pinch of stevia

This formula should be taken as a tea three to four times a day.

Keville suggests one teaspoon each of chastetree berry, dong quai, eleuthero (formerly known as Siberian ginseng), motherwort, crampbark, and wild yam.

Vitamins and minerals also have a role to play in restoring fertility. Nutritional deficiencies can be a cause of infertility, and double-blind research has