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New York Times bestselling author of *Women’s Bodies*, *Women’s Wisdom* and *The Wisdom of Menopause*

HOW TO CONCEIVE NATURALLY

and Have a Healthy Pregnancy After 30

CHRISTA ORECCHIO, CN, HHC AND
WILLOW BUCKLEY, CCH, CD(DONA)

Foreword by Sara Gottfried, MD

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AND HAVE A HEALTHY
PREGNANCY AFTER 30



Christa Orecchio, CN, HHC
and
Willow Buckley CCH, CD(DONA)

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Foreword



I'm board certified in everything that can go wrong with the female body. As I began to practice medicine, I soon realized that when it comes to fertility, there are crucial facts that doctors don't share with you which are vital to your future childbearing. I call it the fertility gap. The gap became obvious to me as I approached women's health from a functional medicine perspective, gained twenty years of clinical experience, and was pregnant with my two daughters in my thirties.

The fertility gap is largely unknown and unacknowledged in mainstream medicine, and few women have access to the secrets that could boost their fertility naturally. *Until now.*

While I haven't suffered personally with infertility, I now know that I could have done a better job in serving the 20,000 patients that I've take care of in the past few decades. What troubles me most is that many women lose faith in their biology and ability to conceive without high-tech interventions. They stop trusting their body's innate intelligence. That's deeply disturbing to me, and my discomfort evolved into a call to action. Witnessing the growing mistrust among my patients and family members as they tried unsuccessfully to conceive, I thought I should write a book about natural fertility. Alas, other books (plus mothering!) got in the way. Fortunately, I'm off the hook because the book I wanted to write is the one you hold in your hands, by Christa Orecchio and Willow Buckley.

Willow received a bachelor's degree in neuropsychology and completed further studies to become certified in classical homeopathy. She is also a doula and a prenatal yoga instructor. She is fiercely committed to the body's power to heal itself when provided with proper nutrition and supplementation, having

experienced her own body's innate intelligence during pregnancy and natural childbirth and observing it in her practice. She considers her own two babies as proof of the concepts that are detailed in *How to Conceive Naturally*.

Christa became a nutritionist after becoming very sick with the problems that conventional medicine failed to address: systemic candidiasis after prolonged antibiotic use, adrenal burnout, and undiagnosed low thyroid function. Functional nutrition saved her life, and she has the type of zeal to pay it forward that can only be called a mission. She was on a path toward autoimmunity and insulin resistance, but reclaimed her life by making food her medicine. Now you can, too.

Like me, Christa came up against the fertility gap in her nutrition practice five years ago. Suddenly, women in their late thirties and early forties started to seek her help after a despairing lack of success getting pregnant with conventional approaches. Together, Christa and these women rolled up their sleeves and got down to the hard work of root cause analysis, healing their hormones, and resetting their microbiome and bodies with cell-to-soul nutrition. As the first cohort of women began to conceive in the first few months of collaborative care, more women were drawn to Christa's practice.

Juxtaposed with her clinical experience, Christa told Willow (who was preparing for her first pregnancy) that she was increasingly fascinated by natural fertility and lamented the lack of available books that provided a step-by-step guide for women about how to eat before, during, and after pregnancy to ensure a healthy mother and child. Or how to cleanse and prepare the body before conception, which became the nexus of their "five trimester" approach to this important life cycle for women. In health circles, Christa is known as the go-to guru for repairing leaky gut. She has extensively researched and developed protocols for how to set up the microbiome *before conception* in order to contribute not only to one's future child but also to future generations due to the genetic impact the state of the microbiome has on conception and pregnancy. Since this concept is still emerging, there are no other books available on the topic. I can tell you from my own understanding of the science that this may be the most important contribution to obstetrics of the decade.

At this point, you may be wondering if the book is full of geeky science,

and I don't want to steer you wrong. I love that you'll find very practical advice about simple measures such as eating half of a banana with Himalayan pink salt and raw cashews before bed to boost serotonin for natural sleep restoration. You'll learn how to sew up the holes in your gut by drinking bone broth. You'll unearth the importance of collagen, pastured ghee, and coconut oil for resetting your hormones. You'll understand the connection between your gut and liver, and the role of this dynamic duo in your fertility. You'll get a game plan to fix polycystic ovary syndrome, the hormonal imbalance that affects 30 percent of U.S. women and is the leading cause of infertility. Most importantly, you'll learn how to shut off the stress response, which I've found is at the core of most infertility struggles.

In conclusion, I chose to write the foreword to this important book because of the fertility gap. I imagine that if you picked up this book, you likewise have suffered as a result of the gap between what is offered by conventional medicine and what you most need for natural fertility. This book matters because it's a practical, easy-to-use guide for how to use food as your medicine for every week of pregnancy and at all times in your life as a woman. Whether you are considering the possibility of a baby in the near future, or you simply want to keep your options open, or you're a veteran of the fertility wars, this book has the food-based remedies you most need.

Sara Gottfried, MD

New York Times bestselling author of *The Hormone Cure*

Preface



Holistic practices brought us together and together we are bringing you an incredible conception, pregnancy, and postpartum guidebook. We'd like to take a moment to introduce ourselves.

Christa Orecchio is a clinical and holistic nutritionist with nine years of experience in private practice and an astounding success rate at helping thousands of people heal and thrive using three guiding principles:

1. Always aim to identify the root cause of a health issue instead of addressing and managing individual symptoms.
2. Use food as your medicine whenever possible.
3. Combine the clinical aspects of healing with mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of healing in order to address the whole person to achieve truly vibrant health.

These three guiding principles led Christa to discover how to help women conceive naturally, healthfully, and quickly by paying homage to the inherent wisdom of their own bodies. Her philosophy and process is simple: Give the body what it needs, remove what burdens it, and it will heal itself. It is also effective: She has helped hundreds of individual clients get pregnant using the principles in this book.

Christa's nutrition practice, *The Whole Journey*, was one of the busiest nutrition practices in San Diego with a team of nutritionists and chefs behind it. Then, in 2013, she decided to shift directions so that she could help more people

at once than was possible in a one-on-one setting. She hosts a weekly FOX San Diego segment called “Food as Medicine” and is the cohost of a nationally syndicated health talk show on the Doctor Television Channel (DrTV) called *The Randy and Christa Show*. She also concurrently developed a series of online courses for The Whole Journey that have successfully guided thousands of people through distinct programs that focus on nutrition and/or digestive repair. All of Christa’s programs focus on digestive health first, as the cornerstone of building the health of the entire body, and especially to prepare for conception.

Willow Buckley is a certified classical homeopath, labor doula, prenatal yoga instructor, wife, and mother of two.

As a homeopath, Willow has treated hundreds of children and infants. Her studies taught her to always take the mother’s pregnancy and birth details into account because this was often a key element to finding the best remedy for the child. Her goal was nothing more than keeping the health and emotional well-being of the mother balanced before and during pregnancy so that her children would have strong immune systems. She feels that treating the mother before and during pregnancy is like treating the soil before a seed is sewn. The soil will be nutrient dense and will be the most nourishing for the plant to grow.

This way of thinking attracted her to all things birth related, and she became a certified labor doula. In this place of maternal support, she has been able to guide and treat women while pregnant, during labor and birth, and in the weeks and months following delivery; she even treats the whole family for years afterwards. She cherishes the chance to nourish the body, the soil, and loves to see her clients gracefully experience being pregnant, laboring, and giving birth. Her many clients benefit from her postpartum care for both the mother and the baby. Whether it’s nutrition, homeopathy, or other holistic suggestions, she is often their first call with questions.

As a holistic clinical nutritionist and a homeopath/doula, we strive to live out the holistic lifestyle every day. So how did we come to write this book together?

Four years ago, while Christa, Willow, and Willow's husband, Marcus, were having dinner together, Willow and Marcus mentioned they were on a six-month cleanse to prepare to conceive their first child. Willow told Christa she was looking for a holistic nutrition book that outlined the benefits of the baby's growth at each stage through food and supplements and asked for a recommendation. Christa could not think of a single one—and she's built her business on being the go-to nutritional expert for thousands of people! So Christa told Willow: "Let's write it." The four years that followed brought endless brainstorming sessions, hours at the computer distilling years of collective wisdom and clinical experience, and the first-hand lessons learned from Willow's two pregnancies—both after the age of thirty, and both of which successfully embodied the principles presented in this book.

The prenatal books we have read usually focus on just one aspect of pregnancy: nutrition and recipes; or what to expect in your changing body; or learning about the development of your growing baby; or exploring alternative approaches to pregnancy, including herbal remedies and midwifery. Some include research to support their content, while others rely on their experience to inform topics.

This book is different because it is a comprehensive guide that covers every step of the journey to having a baby naturally, from preconception to postpartum. We believe that having a child is not limited to three trimesters but actually entails five trimesters. The first is preconception and the fifth is the first few months postpartum. (For more information on the five trimesters, please see page xv.) There is no reason to limit the journey to while the baby is inside the womb, as preparing the body before conception and taking care of the body after birth can make drastic positive health impacts for both mom and baby. We provide evidenced-based nutritional guidelines and scientific findings, as well as experience-based advice at each trimester for the health of mom, baby, *and* dad. For each stage of the journey, we provide a clear guide for what to remove from a mama-to-be's diet, what to add, and menu options to incorporate these suggestions.

We address the more uncomfortable realities of each phase of pregnancy and postpartum (morning sickness, heartburn, mastitis) with classical

homeopathic remedies and holistic lifestyle suggestions to not only ease discomfort but to actually enhance a sense of well-being. We are a mother's biggest cheerleaders—education, empowerment, and encouragement underlie every sentence we write to each of you amazing women.

Although this book is beneficial for every woman looking to get pregnant, we do focus on women age thirty and older who wish to conceive naturally—an age we have traditionally been told is a “bit too late” for easy conception. Through it all we present the most current research in nutrition and homeopathy to equip you with wide-ranging knowledge with which you can make your best choices. In a time that can bring great uncertainty and fear, we provide empowerment and the support of your best (and most knowledgeable) girlfriends.

We are so honored to be your guides on this most beautiful journey.

*With love,
Christa and Willow*

INTRODUCTION



A Great Joy Is Coming

Congratulations! You just made an exceptional commitment to yourself, your future, and your family's future as you embark on one of life's most unique and magical journeys—creating a new life.

So much of health care and pregnancy today is about tricking and forcing the body to do what you want it to do, but our philosophy is very different. By the end of this book, we hope yours will be, too.

There is so much thought that goes into a baby's name, the decor of the nursery, and the due date, but what about the health and well-being of both mom and dad before conception? What about the health and well-being of mom and baby during pregnancy and the first few months of postpartum? We are finding more and more women are looking for a more holistic approach to pregnancy and we are here to take it to the next level, beyond the traditional three trimesters.

THE FIVE TRIMESTERS: OUR UNIQUE APPROACH

Research shows that there are many factors that can affect the baby and mother before she even conceives. Once a woman finds out she's pregnant, she will likely pick up the nutrition books, abide by all the "rules," and take great care of herself to care for her unborn baby. But if we relate the baby to a seed, what was in the soil that nourished that seed to take root? The nutrients in the soil will contribute greatly to the health of the seed and ultimately to the mature plant. This is

why the preconception period, three months prior to conceiving, is so crucial. It is the time period to till and nourish the soil of which a seed will be produced and take root. That's why one of our goals in this book is to help you prepare your body for conception through nutrition, cleansing, and mindfulness.

Then there's the period after the baby is born, when many women can unintentionally let their health slide in effort to keep up with the demands of taking care of a newborn. This unconscious tendency to let our own health slip instead of keeping it high on the priority list has far reaching effects. It can be the difference between a vibrant postpartum period for both mom and baby or one characterized by lower milk production, colic, and sleepless nights for mom and baby, not to mention a long road back for mom to feel at home in her body again.

While we generally use the traditional three-trimester designations throughout this book, we actually prefer a five-trimester approach. The preconception period is the first trimester. The traditional three trimesters of gestation are trimesters two through four. And the postpartum period is trimester five. The five-trimester approach is the most holistic approach to the timeline of pregnancy. As holistic practitioners with roots in a medical healing tradition called "functional medicine," we always aim to look at the body as one systemic organism. Our goal is to heal from the root cause in lieu of addressing individual symptoms, organs, and glands. All body systems are intricately interconnected and any one system affects all the others, much like when you toss a stone into a pond, the entire pond ripples. This isn't limited to physical health, but includes mental and emotional health as well.

Quantifying pregnancy as just the 40-week gestation period is incomplete, because it doesn't address the entire person and invite true healing and balance from the root cause. Here's a closer look at the five trimesters:

- **First Trimester:** This is the 3-plus months before conception. During this time we want to look at the physical, mental, and emotional state of both the mother and father. As part of our preconception plan, you will evaluate your and your partner's state of health to prepare both of you mentally and physically for conceiving a healthy baby. We will guide you through a 12-week fertility program to prime your body for a healthy pregnancy.

- Second Trimester: The first 13 weeks of the pregnancy, medically named the first trimester. Congratulations, the preparation you and your partner put into the preconception phase (our first trimester) will pay off in spades in growth of the baby and health of mom's body. This trimester part of our book provides specific nourishing needs, physically and mentally, for both mom and baby.
- Third Trimester: Weeks 14 through 28 of pregnancy, medically named the second trimester. This is the glory trimester for most moms as energy increases, and nausea and other unpleasant second trimester symptoms decrease. Plus, this is when mom first starts to feel tiny baby kicks—talk about overall bliss!
- Fourth Trimester: Weeks 29 through 40 or delivery, medically named the third trimester. This is the home stretch of pregnancy when the baby is finalizing her development in utero as she prepares for life in the outside world.
- Fifth Trimester: The first 3-plus months postdelivery. During this special trimester, mother and father welcome their new baby. This time is crucial for supporting and recalibrating the mother's body to balance hormonal levels, ensuring optimal nutrition for breast-feeding, and making for an easy, enjoyable transition into motherhood. We share our 12-week postpartum plan designed to balance your hormones safely and effectively.

This five-trimester model is a comprehensive approach we've tried and tested on hundreds of woman with astounding success. Our first trimester (preconception) affects the second through the fifth, and the fifth is affected by the first through fourth. To not include our first and fifth trimester would be like telling a story or listening to a song with no beginning or end. Either would be incomplete.

A HEALTHY PREGNANCY AT TWENTY, THIRTY, OR FORTY YEARS OF AGE

Why should every woman, at any age, prepare her body for baby making? Truthfully, we should all take the reins of our body and nourish it, but even

more so before we choose to have it create and nourish another, beautiful, growing human—one of the greatest miracles and privileges of the human experience. We don't leave for a road trip with a car full of clutter and an overdue oil change and expect our car to provide a safe and enjoyable journey, so how can we expect our bodies to do the same? We don't show up to run a marathon without proper training, so why would we expect our body to conceive easily and perform the miraculous feat of growing a child for 40 weeks without proper preparation? As speed racer Bobby Unser puts it, "Success is where preparation and opportunity meet." This book is designed to make conception easier and faster and to ensure the healthiest pregnancy possible.

The positive changes you make to your diet and health before you get pregnant will have long-reaching effects. What we do before conception can change the health of our future children and even the children that they will have on a genetic level by turning on certain genes and turning off others (see page 11 in Chapter 1 for more on epigenetics). This book is your guide to maintaining a healthy pregnancy and nourishing your body and baby all the way up to delivery and the important months following, and the positive changes you make now are the best gifts you can give your children and your future grandchildren and great grandchildren!

This book is for any woman who wants to take charge of her health and her family's health to have a natural, healthy conception. But we also wrote this book with women who are thirty years and older in mind, a time period when natural fertility tends to decrease and couples increasingly turn to invasive (and expensive) treatments to conceive. We hope this book will show you that there is another way. We will address the challenges associated with "advanced maternal age" and why this book is especially imperative for women over age thirty.

Research and personal experience tells us that more women are delaying first pregnancies in favor of career advancement, or because they waited to find the right partner. This is creating an entire generation of women in their thirties and forties seeking to improve their fertility and chances for conception past what had previously been deemed "prime" childbearing years. For women thirty-five and older who wish to conceive naturally, the availability of

instructional and educational books on how to do so is very limited, and the literature that does exist is less than encouraging.

We are different because we not only believe that women ages thirty-five and older can conceive naturally, but we *know* they can thrive throughout preconception, pregnancy, and postpartum based on our clinical and personal experience with hundreds of women in this age category. We challenge the idea of so-called “geriatric pregnancies” with the truth of inspiring, real-life stories of healthy, happy pregnancies and babies for women in their late thirties and early forties, including Christa’s then forty-three-year-old client who had tried unsuccessfully to get pregnant for six years, even after multiple rounds of intrauterine insemination and in vitro fertilization (IVF). After six months of working with Christa, she successfully conceived and today has a healthy, happy toddler.

This and other success stories demonstrate the power and efficacy of our approach to pregnancy, particularly later in life. We understand there could be inherent challenges that can come with conceiving and delivering a baby after the age of thirty-five. Issues around infertility, increased chance of miscarriage, increased likelihood of other physical conditions, fatigue, and higher rates of cesarean delivery are all real challenges a woman in her thirties or forties may face when trying to conceive. Many expecting mothers struggle with or are concerned about complications, including extreme fatigue, preeclampsia, postpartum depression, longer postpartum recovery times, and difficulty breastfeeding. Although we often have no control on how a baby wants to enter this world, we believe nourishing the body physically, mentally, and emotionally will positively prepare it for all possible experiences. This book tackles these concerns and issues one by one, and outlines our time-tested nutritional and lifestyle solutions for each, including easy-to-follow protocols at each stage. We present classical homeopathic remedies and holistic lifestyle suggestions to not only ease discomfort but to enhance a sense of well-being.

Our philosophy is simple: Give the body what it needs and remove what is dragging it down, and it will heal itself. No tricking, forcing, or drugging necessary. By working *with* the body instead of against it, we’ve seen so many people’s health and life powerfully transform. Anyone at any age will benefit.

Coming from this place of support and encouragement, we acknowledge that difficulties may arise, and for each stage of the journey, we provide specific guides for which foods to avoid, which ones to add, and menu options to easily incorporate these suggestions.

TRUST IN YOUR BRILLIANT BODY

The human body is absolutely amazing. How does the body know to keep the lungs breathing and the heart beating? How does it know when to go to sleep, wake up, and go to the bathroom? How does it know to maintain a 98.6°F body temperature, and tighten the eyes when bright light shines in? And how in the world can you explain the sheer miracle of creating and birthing another human life?

With this rock-solid proof that the body knows *exactly* what it's doing, we often still let the mind trump the body and try to force and beat it into submission, instead of reading the clear signs, the symptoms, it gives us about what it needs.

This book is based on a few assumptions. The first assumption is that the body—*your* body—is a true super-computer that doesn't make mistakes. Secondly, it will always be there for you, instantaneously reorganizing itself to clear inappropriate materials from the bloodstream (among a million other automatic functions), with its highest goal of keeping you safe and healthy. The last assumption is that when you give your body the true nourishment it needs and take away what ails it, it will heal itself and allow you to thrive.

All of these functions—when working as they are intended to work—conspire to allow you to conceive naturally in your twenties, into your late thirties and even early forties.

A key component in creating lasting, positive change in your health and life is mindset—understanding and integrating new ideas that include dropping fad or outdated diets in favor of creating and maintaining a sustainable lifestyle.

As you go through this book, be kind to yourself. You may have been trying to get pregnant for a while, are just about to start trying, about to be a

second-time mom, or already in your third trimester—everyone starts with a clean slate today. It's possible that you may already have known or incorporated some of what we recommend in previous pregnancies or trimesters, or you may find that you haven't done even ten percent of what we recommend. Wherever you are is exactly where you are meant to be.

Wherever you are, don't worry! How can we possibly hold ourselves accountable to what we didn't know or didn't choose to do before today? Mamas, please don't dwell on yesterday; instead, marvel at the journey that starts today. Celebrate your progress, no matter how big or small. Learn from your challenges (we all have them!) while looking after yourself and your growing baby. While you should experience major positive changes in your body and your life as a result of our recommendations, your experience ultimately depends on you: You get out what you put in. So let's give it our all!



Now that I know better, I do better.

—ATTRIBUTED TO MAYA ANGELOU



TAKING THE BATTERIES OUT OF THE BIOLOGICAL CLOCK

The biological clock: Whoever came up with that term? More often than not it's used as a scare tactic, throwing perfectly healthy women who have just entered their thirties into near panic. And in a culture that prizes personal and career growth and achievement, this presents a very real problem for the generations of women who are blazing their own trails before hitching their wagon to a partner and children.

So how much is biological—and, therefore, inescapable—fact, and how much is old wives' tales run amok? We have done our homework (and real-life work) to parse out the truth in the middle of all the confusion so to quell some fears and help you make your best, most educated decisions for yourselves.

But before we dive in to the science, we want to *strongly* encourage you right now to form a new kind of relationship with your health and your body, one that is highly countercultural to mainstream health care. We encourage you to trust it and to trust in the process you are going through. The following commitments can change your relationship with your body, and also completely revolutionize the way you perceive yourself as a whole being. This list was adapted from one of Christa's nutrition schools, the Institute for Integrative Nutrition.

- To honor your body as the temple of your soul.
- To offer it healthy foods and drinks.
- To believe that you *deserve* to be healthy and vibrant.
- To overcome addictions that hurt it.
- To love and appreciate it for all that it already does every day.
- To accept that you have the power to heal it.
- To use laughter, play, and rest as essential ways to help your body feel good.
- To exercise regularly and appropriately for your body type.
- To accept your body and be grateful for it through the pregnancy journey, just as it is.
- To listen to messages your body sends when you are hurt or sick.
- To accept that unexpressed emotions and thoughts affect your physical state.
- To embody the wisdom that your body and baby know just what to do.¹

Don't worry if this sounds daunting or if you aren't ready to make all of these commitments just yet. We will give you a lot of tips to truly take care of yourself throughout this book, because once you get past that hurdle, the rest is a breeze.

Get ready to have your previous ideas about food debunked and forever change the way you think about food. Prepare to absorb all we know about nutrition, starting now. Most approaches to nutrition during pregnancy focus on calories, carbs, fats, proteins, and restrictive foods that are allegedly good

or bad. Others just give the green light to eat everything but the kitchen sink during pregnancy.

Our philosophy provides the tools to help create happier, healthier lives, without focusing on willpower or deprivation. This book will prepare you for easier conception, a vibrant pregnancy, and graceful journey into motherhood. So let's get this healthy party started.

HOW DOES FOOD HELP YOU GET THERE?

As you make better food choices, your biochemistry improves and with it your mood, energy levels, and outlook on life. How can that *not* have a dramatically positive effect on you and your growing baby, as well as on your family and everyone else with whom you interact every single day?

We have both been in professional private practice for more than nine years and we see clients do amazingly positive things with their lives once they find true health and nourishment. It is incredibly inspiring.

We are firm believers in setting a solid, healthy foundation during preconception: This is the key to conceiving naturally in your thirties and forties. Proper nutrition forms the core of this foundation and dramatically affects preconception health—that is, the quality of your eggs and your man's sperm (which is why we also give tips for the dad-to-be). Prenatal nutrition also determines the quality of the developing baby's major organs and even her predisposition to certain diseases.

Infertility over age 30 may have any number of issues at its root, making it truly challenging to parse out, understand, and appropriately remedy. Our approach is to slowly and methodically rule out various causes, looking first to the most prominent symptoms as guideposts for where to start.

Our approach to nutrition and health, while highly clinical, also focuses on elements other than food that nourish us, including honest and open relationships, a meaningful spiritual practice, a career or creative outlet that inspires you, and physical activity that is enjoyable (aka *not* having to drag yourself to the gym).

By creating a balance between the clinical aspects of health and what foods,

behaviors, and activities nourish you every day, you will experience gradual but steady changes and improvements in your health and well-being. This enables you to not only achieve your and your baby's health goals, but to maintain them for life, while being flexible with your diet for years to come. Powerful stuff, right? We think so.

In this book, we also incorporate homeopathy and other natural approaches for living a centered, balanced, healthy life every day *and* for creating another precious human life. We believe many people suffer unnecessarily. If you struggle with certain health conditions, we are here to support you. We are here to offer suggestions on how to naturally strengthen the whole system, regardless of the condition. It is our mission to empower you to stop suffering and pave the way for our future generations to thrive.

You have that power. So, let's get started!

Enjoy this book, make consistently positive changes in your life *at your own pace*—but most of all, have fun!

CHAPTER ONE



Holistic Mama Prep

Before the bedroom: Getting your body ready for easier
and healthier baby-making

How many of us really think about where our food goes after we eat it? It's just gone and we move on with our day, right?

Actually, no. Food can be the most powerful medicine or the slowest form of poison, depending on what, how, and why we eat. Our food, once digested properly, is absorbed into our blood. Our blood is what creates our cells, tissues, organs, skin, hair, nails, and even the quality of our emotions and thoughts. We really do think and feel differently when we eat wild salmon and broccoli with brown rice versus a doughnut and fries, or drink plain water versus coffee and alcohol. If we're being honest, we all know this to be true based on personal experience.

However, even the healthiest people—including health practitioners like us—don't eat perfectly all the time, because there is no such thing as perfect. What is possible, though, is to abide by something called the 80/20 rule; 80 percent of the time we are very intentional about choosing clean, healthy, nourishing food. The other 20 percent of the time we indulge because it just feels good or is convenient.

Many body reactions are biochemically controlled by the food we eat, including our baby-making hormones and ovulation. It's helpful to envision the process of biochemistry like a whirlpool. When we are not eating healthily, we get stuck in a negative biochemical whirlpool of toxicity, which is continuously

fueled by nutritional deficiencies. This is how the vicious cycle of cravings, overeating, and weight gain ensues. We desperately want to make different choices, but we literally *can't*. It's too overpowering. The cravings sneak up behind us. They call our name and pull us down.

In real-life terms, this is when you wake up and have to have a cup of coffee to *officially* wake up. You may follow this with a pastry, bagel, or a muffin, which are mostly simple and refined carbohydrates that get converted into sugar quickly during the digestion process. Both of these choices have signaled your whirlpool to flow the wrong way, meaning you are training your body to burn sugar instead of fat while operating on stress hormones that burn short and fast (like fireworks) instead of “real food” that is burned slowly and evenly. And it's not even 8 a.m.!

Sugar is sugar no matter how it is ingested or what form it comes in—and it comes in many forms. Whether it's a spoonful of the white stuff, or a breakfast muffin, the aftereffect will be the same. When a bagel or muffin with a high glycemic index (the measure of how much or little a food affects blood sugar levels—the higher a food is on the glycemic index, the higher your blood sugar rises after you eat it) is consumed, your pancreas releases the hormone insulin in order to process the sugar efficiently. When you force your body to secrete an excess of insulin to manage a high-sugar or refined-carbohydrate diet, your cells become more and more resistant to insulin which leads to weight gain and hormonal issues.

Later you crave more caffeine and sugar—this makes sense; you started the day with both and now the body wants more short, quick bursts of energy because it is trained to run on low-quality fuel. But the next part is a little trickier. The negative whirlpool has also triggered cravings for fried or overly salty foods. All of these are false forms of energy, which are dangerous because they worsen nutritional deficiencies by putting a strain on your adrenals and increasing risk of disease.

Why does sugar have such far-reaching effects? Sugar is a quick fix that leaches our body of the important vitamins, minerals, and nutrients we need to function optimally. The adrenal glands (the gas tank of the body) need fat and protein and myriad of other nutrients like trace minerals, B vitamins, and omega-3 fatty acids

to thrive. When we eat foods high in sugar that provide a quick fix, not only does it kill the good bacteria in our gut (more about good bacteria—probiotics—on page 56), preventing it from manufacturing essential B vitamins and vitamin K on its own, but it also leaches key minerals like magnesium and B vitamins from the body. This weakens our system and drains the gas out of our tank, so to speak, leading to depleted and impaired adrenal gland output and further hormonal imbalances that impair our ability to conceive naturally.

Ready for the good news? This unhealthy pattern is easily fixed by your body's own healing capacity. We thrive when we give our body what it really needs. The whirlpool will begin to shift until it flows in the right direction, naturally, on its own. It's a pretty cool concept to live a life without cravings, willpower, or denial, right? Balance and health truly are our natural state.

We always need to honor our bodies where they currently are (sick or well, working or not). Depending on where we are in life—is this a period of intense stress and change or one of stability, one of stasis or one of development?—we need to eat differently to accommodate what our bodies most need at that particular time. Our body is a vessel that is made to house and nourish an unborn baby for around nine months. Once we recognize the fundamental function food plays in every aspect of our well-being and creating life, we can use it as a healthy anchor in today's fast-paced, uncertain world. Food can be the tether that takes us to an internal state of peace and vibrancy that optimally prepares the body for conception and for nourishing a baby for nine months, regardless of our external conditions. It is that powerful.

Remember, you wouldn't want to start a road trip with a cluttered car or without an oil change. This process streamlines and preps your body for a much smoother and more enjoyable experience so you can cruise, instead of sputter, throughout pregnancy.

A PROGRAM FOR EVERY PREGNANCY, NOT JUST THE FIRST

We can't stress enough how important your preconception health and well-being is before you try to conceive, and we'd like to sing from the rooftops how

it is even more important when regarding conception for your second, third, or fourth child, especially if you already have a toddler.

Let's face it, getting pregnant the first time is enough to knock anyone's socks off. It is so overwhelmingly exciting that you can't get enough of all things baby, all things belly, and all things adorable because babies are so tiny and precious.

Getting pregnant the second time brings all these wonderfully familiar feelings, but with virtually no time to experience them or notice them—at least that was true in Willow's case. Willow got pregnant when her son was fifteen months old, and in her opinion, toddlers are like treadmills without an off button. In fact, they are treadmills with an incline of six and a speed of ten. If you add morning sickness and fatigue to this, you have a fantastic recipe for...well, destruction. It can take its toll. But it doesn't have to.

By boosting your body's health before you are pregnant, you can give yourself and your baby the best vitality possible and get back to having enough energy for an all-day treadmill marathon with your toddler *and* enjoying all things baby, belly, and tiny.

Mama Story: Willow, age 36

Because we don't just talk the talk, but walk the walk, we wanted to share our own journeys and experiences, too.

I personally have reaped and not reaped the benefits of fully preparing before conception. With my first pregnancy, I was so dedicated to serving my body and my future baby that I did it all. While pregnant, we first started writing this book, and I was living the words and pages we were writing. It was easy to do when it was just me and my husband, Marcus. My pregnancy was glorious. I experienced the cravings, the fatigue, and a little nausea, but it was welcomed with open arms and I relished every bit of it, because overall I felt vibrant and enjoyed it all.

I struggled much more with my second pregnancy. I did as much as I

thought I could before conception, but in retrospect, I could have done more. I had such glowing results from my first pregnancy and the work I did to prepare that I must have thought that work would roll over to my second pregnancy. Well, I was wrong. I ate all the right foods, took the supplements, and avoided most of all things we recommend avoiding. But I didn't cleanse my body as much as I could have, and I just didn't really assess where I was at the time. I could have greatly benefited from a more regimented cleanse, following the steps we lay out in this book in more depth.

Having two kids within two years takes a toll on the body. I was running after a one-year-old during the second pregnancy instead of doing daily prenatal yoga. The option to slow down isn't always an option when you have a toddler. It's important to reset your system in between children because the adrenal glands need a full two years to recover from the enormous energy it takes to create a human life. I had not thought about this in the preconception planning, and I wish I had. I was much sicker during the second pregnancy—really sick. I was close to vomiting every day from week 7 to 12. They were some of the toughest moments in my life because I had this adorable, loving one-year-old who needed me. If I listened to what I preach, “every pregnancy is unique and different,” I would have approached the preconception phase with a lot more compassion and effort. Please don't ignore the assessment part of the preconception planning.

I also suffered from horrible skin rashes around my nose and under my eyes, which in both traditional Chinese medicine and functional medicine are connected to both toxicity and a congested gallbladder, as well as pathogenic activity (more bad bugs than good) in the gut. The gut microbiome is the foundation of all human health. I needed gut rejuvenation, but was already pregnant and too far along for cleansing and this process. I ate more raw beets (3 cups a week), and avoided all nuts, which was a safe food-based cleansing approach for my gut and gallbladder. I weathered through with homeopathy at my side to ease the morning sickness (the more congested your liver and gallbladder, the more nausea you will have, especially in the

morning). Within a few weeks, my skin began improving and the morning sickness went away completely.

I just didn't think I had a delicate system, but delicate was the wrong word. All systems benefit from proper gut rejuvenation in life in general, but especially in between pregnancies. I really wished Christa's Gut Thrive in 5 microbiome rejuvenation program (gutthrive.com) had existed prior to this pregnancy. But since it didn't, I didn't have the opportunity that all of you have now. Eating right and taking supplements are great, but often we might need a more detailed tune-up before we go for it, especially if it's round two, three, or four.

SO, LET'S ASSESS!

A baby grows from the materials provided by its mother. The healthier you are when you get pregnant, the more you increase the chance for optimal growth for baby. Not to mention the fact that it makes it easier for you during pregnancy, so that you avoid depleting your reserves. You have to know where you are in order to know where you're going. No judgment here; we're just having a good, honest look at everything so you can map out and customize the process of designing a super vessel for your super baby.

Take our Where to Start Assessment (on the next page) to find out where you fall on the spectrum of health as you prepare to get pregnant. The results of this test will help you determine exactly how healthy you are now and how much preparation you may need to get pregnant, taking into consideration factors such as diet, your relationship with food, potential toxicity, and nutritional deficiencies. Like an internal GPS, we must set our starting point in order to route the best path to optimal health for you and your developing baby.

Simply circle the answer that most closely resembles your current lifestyle and add up the points at the end.

WHERE TO START ASSESSMENT

POINTS	0	1	2	3
How many 8-ounce caffeinated beverages do you drink a day?	0	1	2	3 or more
How many alcoholic beverages do you drink a week?	0	2-3	5	More than 5
Do you smoke?	No			Yes
How many times have you taken antibiotics in your life?	Never	3-5 times	5-7 times	More than 7 times
Are you taking pharmaceuticals (prescription and over the counter) daily?	No	1 drug	2 drugs	3 or more drugs
How often do you take over-the-counter medications?	Never	Once a month	More than once a month	Daily
How often do you consume sugar? Include not just candy or dessert, but sugar hiding in things like bread, yogurt, and condiments, to name a few.	Almost never	Once a week	A few times a week	Daily
Have you had/how often do you get yeast infections or urinary tract infections (UTIs)?	Never	Every 3-5 years or less	Once a year	More than once a year
What is the frequency of your bowel movements?	Two or more times daily	Once daily	Every other day	Every few days
Do you typically eat breakfast?	Yes			No
How often do you eat out in a week?	Never	Up to 3 times	4-5 times	More than 5 times

8 HOW TO CONCEIVE NATURALLY

POINTS	0	1	2	3
How many 8-ounce glasses of water do you drink daily?	More than 8	8	5-7	3-5
Where do you grocery shop?	Farmers' market, my own garden, and/or food co-op	Health food store		Conventional grocery store
Do you eat fried food or fast food 2 or more times per week (including at home)?	No			Yes
How many artificial sweeteners do you consume a day? (Includes soda and other diet drinks, gum, and pink, yellow, and blue packets in coffee or tea.)	0	1-3	3-6	More than 6
How many 1-cup servings of non-starchy vegetables do you eat a day?	More than 4	2-4	1-2	1 or less
What is your energy level?	Great	OK	Too many dips	Exhausted
Describe your sleep.	Sound/great	Hard to fall asleep	Wake up in the middle of the night or too early	Insomnia
What is your BMI? (One website that you can calculate your BMI is the National Institute for Health's website.)	18-25%	Less than 18%	25-30%	30% or higher
Are you anemic?	No	Yes	Not sure	

Do you experience dizziness?	No	Yes		
Do you have low blood pressure?	No	Yes	Not sure	
COLUMN TOTALS:				
GRAND TOTAL:				

Score of 0 to 15: Ready to rock. If you scored anywhere in this range, your current level of health and lifestyle habits is healthy—very cool. Prepare for some fine tuning and get ready to rock!

Score of 16 to 30: Not bad; pat yourself on the back. You have a good foundation and are fairly healthy but it's time to step it up a notch. Pace yourself, follow your intuition, and make changes at your own rate. Do not take all of the advice in this book all at once or you risk detoxing too quickly. Rather, portion it out, week by week, in ways that keep you motivated and inspired.

Score of over 30: There's no better time to start than right now. If you scored more than 30 points, no sweat. We are your guides to help you improve your lifestyle in small increments so the changes last. Just a few subtle changes will have big effects on your health. We suggest you keep a notepad as you read this book and list three things from each chapter that you would like to add to or omit from your current regimen.

Choose things that sound exciting and doable, not things that sound onerous and overwhelming (or you risk becoming frustrated and giving up completely.) Start with a few changes from Chapter 1 and then add more at your own pace (and so on and so forth). Little by little, your biochemistry will begin to shift with every change you make. After a few weeks, you'll notice the difference and feel excited to incorporate more and more of this book into your daily life. Eventually, you will find that you've added all of it to your daily routine. It might seem daunting now, but if you add in a few doable

Mama Story: Tory, 41

Tory was a patient of Willow's. Willow referred her to Christa because she knew Christa had helped women with almost the exact same issues in the past. Tory already had two children when she saw Christa, and she wanted a third. However, hyperthyroidism set in after the birth of her second child, complicating her efforts to get pregnant. Christa identified Tory's food sensitivities using the immunoglobulin G (IgG) blood test (see Chapter 2 for more on this). Tory then eliminated the offenders and followed our nutrition plan, including ditching all soy and gluten (she was routinely drinking soy lattes and using soy milk as a "healthier" alternative). Her preconception plan included using antioxidants like alpha lipoic acid and selenium to support her thyroid and adaptogenic herbs like ashwaganda and rhodiola that helped lower her stress hormone levels. We also taught her stress-reduction techniques to calm and soothe her system. She was a super athlete, so we had her work out less rigorously. Her thyroid balanced itself with simple dietary and lifestyle changes within three short months. Her ovulation normalized, and Tory became happily pregnant with baby number three.

changes at a time, you will reap great benefits. We've seen thousands of lives change from following the advice that's in this book and we are so happy that you found us!

THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS

Your unborn child's blueprint for her adult life health starts now. Sounds a bit dramatic, we know, but it is really true. This is why we refer to preconception as the first trimester in this book. Did you know that it takes around 90 days for an egg to mature before conception? This means that its viability—how likely it is that individual egg will be successfully implanted—and its quality is determined more than two months before you "try" to get pregnant. The

same applies to the sperm, which develops about 64 days before it is sent on its most important mission. This means the health of your future little one is determined way before she is even a glimmer in your eye.

You and your partner hold within you the power to create a super baby with the healthiest organs, glands, and tissues possible. Crazy cool, right? Since you have the power, all you need are the tools to help your baby develop to her healthiest extent. This book is your ultimate instructional guide.

What you eat now and what you do now will *affect everything*, even your grandchildren's health. How is this possible? Through epigenetics. Epigenetics are like the on and off switches of our DNA. These switches, once thought to be permanently on or off, are actually capable of changing, and one way we can change the switches to positively affect our DNA and genes is through diet. This was first genetically proven with rats by epigenetics researcher Dr. Randy Jirtle, and outlined in the journal of *Molecular and Cellular Biology* (2003).¹ So you can change your DNA (and hence your baby's) for the better, just by making smart decisions about the foods you eat.

What you eat now and what you do now will affect everything, even your grandchildren's health.

What you eat dramatically influences your gut microbiome, or the combined genetic material of the microorganisms (good and bad bugs) living in your digestive system, which play a significant role in your overall health. The choices you make now will not only affect your health throughout pregnancy, but they will also pay enormous dividends in your child's quality of life, *all the way through* adulthood because your baby will inherit your gut microbiome or the state of your gut health which will lay the foundation for her immune system.

This is why cleaning up gut health is one of the best things you can do for your own health and the health of future generations. Taking the time to carefully and thoughtfully consider how you want to draw your baby's map to health is one of the most loving things you can do for your child. Setting a solid foundation for your baby's health and taking control of your own health and well-being also ensures that you can fully enjoy motherhood. That foundation starts with the biological process of ovulation.

FINDING YOUR UNIQUE OVULATION WINDOW

Ovulation, the short magical window when *everything* is supposed to happen...perfectly. That's a lot of pressure for women to time "just right." This window of fertile opportunity is less than twenty-four hours long and most of us have no idea how to determine it or likely are not determining it correctly. There are a million resources out there that go into great detail with instructions on using thermometers, calendars, fluid viscosity, charts, and the like. We find that most of these ways are a challenging balancing act and can be just downright confusing. So without oversimplifying the process too much, here are our favorite ways to find that perfect little ovulation window.

Let's start with an overview of a woman's cycle based on an average, healthy 28-day cycle.

Day 1: Period starts by bleeding (the lining of the uterus sheds for 3 to 7 days).

Day 14: Ovulation occurs. Ovulation is when a mature egg is released from the ovary and moves into the fallopian tube, where it is available for fertilization. On average, one mature egg is released every month. Ovulation is preceded 24 to 36 hours by a surge of LH, the luteinizing hormone secreted by the pituitary gland (another reason thyroid health is crucial) that triggers the release of the mature egg. Hence a healthy pituitary gland leads to a healthy thyroid and proper ovulation on Day 14.

Day 28: The cycle ends and the period starts again.

Ovulation is the short window and the only time during a cycle that a woman can get pregnant. It is also dependent upon having a viable mature egg released, as well as healthy sperm that are able to reach the egg for fertilization. In between these days, estrogen and progesterone fluctuate with peaks, falls, normalizing...and repeat.

When Do I Ovulate?

Since it is crucial to conceiving, it's important for you to figure out when you're ovulating. First write down or make a note on your computer or phone's calendar the date you start your period for 3 to 4 months. You may have already been tracking this information.

We all ovulate 12 to 16 days *before* our period starts, not 12 to 16 days after. This is why it's hard to *catch* the window. We are working in reverse. For example, if your period cycle is on average 30 days long, then you ovulate around 16 days after you start your period. Sometimes we vary in the length of our cycle, so knowing if you are on the shorter side or longer side of 28 days is extremely helpful when tracking your ovulation window. If your cycle is consistent, you'll be able to count backwards 12 to 16 days from the date you start your period and see when you ovulate.

Some women just know. These are some of the signs:

- Mittelschmerz, which is one-sided, lower abdominal pain associated with ovulation
- The change in viscosity and amount of vaginal discharge
- Basal body temperature, the temperature of your body when you wake up in the morning before you even sit up in bed. Using a basal thermometer, you can chart your temperature over the course of a few months. The body temperature a few days before ovulation occurs is slightly lower. After ovulation, the temperature will rise up. This tells you that you ovulated but isn't that great of an indicator on when you are going to ovulate. Utilize the chart over a few months to see the patterns to find your "window."
- Desire: feeling more attracted to your partner or enhanced sexual desire. After all, our bodies are genetically made to replicate.

These are great ways to find your window, but they are not always foolproof. And they aren't easy for many of us. So what to do if you don't "feel" the time of ovulation? Ovulation test kits are the answer! They are cheap and extremely

easy to use. Some people find them too “sterile,” taking all the spontaneity out of making a baby, but if you have tried a few times spontaneously, have been trying for more than six months, or just want to know your window, we suggest giving a test kit a chance.

The secret trick? Use them correctly.

Step One: Buy a kit with at least 20 strips (most kits provide one reusable test stick with multiple test strips that you insert to use). Willow recommends the brand Clearblue, but for updated product reviews you can check out her website, balancingyourhealth.com.

Step Two: Test your urine 2 to 3 times a day starting 10 days *after the first day of your last period*. Test until the stick gives you a positive for an LH surge, or all the way *through to 21 days after* the first day of your period, whichever happens first. This means you will be testing for 11 full days or until the ovulation stick gives you a positive result. Most women will get this positive result before 11 full days of testing but this lengthy window will help cover all bases and menstrual cycles. If you aren't getting a positive result, make sure you are using the test correctly and then try testing at different times of the day.

You'll want to test more than once a day since the kits test the LH surge that happens in your body prior to ovulation. This LH surge signals the body to release the egg. Ovulation occurs within 24 to 36 hours after the LH surge, so if you only test one time a day you can miss the window and not be able to plan when to go to the bedroom. So testing at least once in the morning and once in the evening will give you a better chance to *catch* your surge and plan your bedroom time.

If you prefer bypassing this information and hitting the bedroom every day for 20 days straight, you might be having *a lot* of fun, but the studies aren't clear on whether this works. They show that daily ejaculations reduce the potency of your man's sperm in terms of volume and sperm concentration, but they do not affect the motility of the sperm, and may possibly improve it.² This was proved in a study by Dr. David Greening of the Australian clinic Sydney IVF where he also suggests that when a man releases sperm daily he's reducing the time the sperm is “hanging out” in the body and thus reducing chances for it to sit too long and become damaged. In his study of 118 men who had higher

than normal sperm DNA damage, after ejaculating for seven days in a row, the percentage of sperm DNA damage dropped 12 percent in 96 of the men. This meant that 81 percent of the group improved their sperm DNA damage by 12 percent. This is enough to move a man from poor or fair into a viable or good range.

No matter how you decide to track your cycle, try and have fun and don't let the rigidity of dates and numbers get in the way of spontaneity. Sometimes a strong desire will steer the body into the right window. Keep things playful and relaxed. Stress caused by tracking ovulation can be just as hard on the body as stress from not getting pregnant. Remember to have fun, and to trust in the process and in something greater than yourself. Know you are doing your best, stay stress-free with an open heart, and keep the faith that if something is meant to happen, it will.

LET'S TALK ABOUT LOVE

When it comes down to it, having a baby should be all about love. Taking a step back to focus on love—on the feeling of loving your partner or spouse so much that you want to create new life, or, if you don't have a partner, focusing on calling this new soul whom you will love unconditionally—changes everything. It reminds you this journey is about so much more than tests and temperatures, cycles and societal pressures. It's nurturing the love you and your partner have and creating room to expand that love for your baby.

Take a little time to evaluate your life and your relationships. Meditate and journal about your health, your ability to take care of yourself, and what you really want for your career and family. And be willing to honestly evaluate the intimacy between you and your partner and choose to invest in that rather than baby chasing. Because the truth is, conception often comes out of deep love and connection and uniting as one.

Incorporate as much of the information you learn here into your diet and life. Shift to a positive mindset away from fear, open your heart, and let the

rest of life happen as it will. You will have so much more peace in this process when you realize that you are not alone and you don't have to do it all by yourself. Release guilt, shame, and fear and replace them with positive emotions. Together, we'll see what happens and we'll be rooting for you along the way.

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the following chapters, we're going to introduce you to a whole new way of thinking about food, your health, your body, and your baby. Starting with how to prepare your body to conceive and taking you all the way through caring for yourself after you have the baby, we hope this book will be your trusted guide for the entire exciting journey ahead of the five trimesters.

Whether you are already pregnant, trying to get pregnant or just thinking about getting pregnant, we encourage you to read the following chapter about preconception. It lays the foundation for your nutrition and is jam-packed with tricks for upgrading your food to rock-star health status.

Chapter 2 will speak directly to anyone suffering with infertility. The information and advice explains how to gently bring your body's natural health and ability to conceive back into balance. Of course, even if you're not struggling with infertility, this information will result in more vibrant health, so it's great advice for all readers.

Most women struggling with infertility tend to turn to Western medicine approaches such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and intrauterine insemination (IUI). There are plenty of other sources of information for these invasive procedures, from books to medical experts. But these options are not the only solution for infertility.

The truth is, myriad factors can complicate the process of conception, particularly after age thirty-five. Whatever your unaddressed "weak link" (digestion, liver, hormones) was in your twenties could now be magnified in your thirties. Issues from gastrointestinal problems, such as leaky gut, where the gut wall-barrier (lining of the small intestine) isn't working properly, to genetic mutations, such as a defect in the MTHFR gene, which affects the body's

detoxification pathways and ability to process folate, a key nutrient that prevents miscarriages, to emotional roadblocks can affect a woman's fertility.

So instead of discussing various invasive procedures, we will focus on achieving and maintaining vibrant health and well-being during the entire journey of creating and carrying life at any age. If you are choosing to undergo or are undergoing IUI, IVF, or the like, you can still do so, this book will only help you that much more: You still want to have a healthy body to increase the possibility of success.

And remember that you are not in this alone: Get Dad on board, too. The quality of his food and supplements equals the quality and potency of his sperm. We like to tell dads they are building super sperm by cleaning up their diet. (See Chapter 10: Becoming a Super Dad, for more details and ways to motivate him to happily join the journey to health.)

So pour a cup of tea and let's really talk about comprehensively assessing your health as you prepare to make your super baby.

CHAPTER TWO



Boosting Your Fertility

Understanding and taking control of your body chemistry
to optimize your reproductive health

Knowledge is power.

—SIR FRANCIS BACON

A 2006 to 2010 national survey of family growth from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) established the average infertility rate of women aged fifteen to forty-four as 10.9 percent and the infertility of men at about 9 percent.¹ That means about 6.1 million women and couples struggle with infertility, or one out of seven couples has trouble conceiving; and that number is projected to climb to one out of three in the next ten years. As a result, the number of infertility clinics has increased by eleven-fold since the 1990s.

If you fall in this category, take a deep breath and try not to fret. Yes, really. There is so much that can be done, and done *naturally*. In a world with seriously declining fertility, high-quality diagnostic lab tests can wield near-magical powers—a few simple tests you can request at a doctor's office can help shed light on why your body isn't ready to conceive. In this chapter, we'll not only share what tests you can ask for, but also provide suggestions on what

to do based on the results of each test. In life—and in fertility—there are often simple solutions to complex problems. These simple tests can provide key health information that can make a vital difference in understanding your body and what it needs to naturally conceive. Your results can often provide missing pieces of information that will help you and your doctor figure out why you might be having a hard time conceiving so that you can address any issues head on with safe and natural remedies.

If you haven't started trying to conceive yet and are a bit anxious about whether you will be able to (since, you know, we spend so much our lives trying *not* to get pregnant), the very first thing we want you to do is trust your body and relax. Stress alone can be your nemesis because it creates hormonal disruption—but more on that later. Let's take an honest look at the realities and common fears women might have about conception and pregnancy in your thirties and early forties.



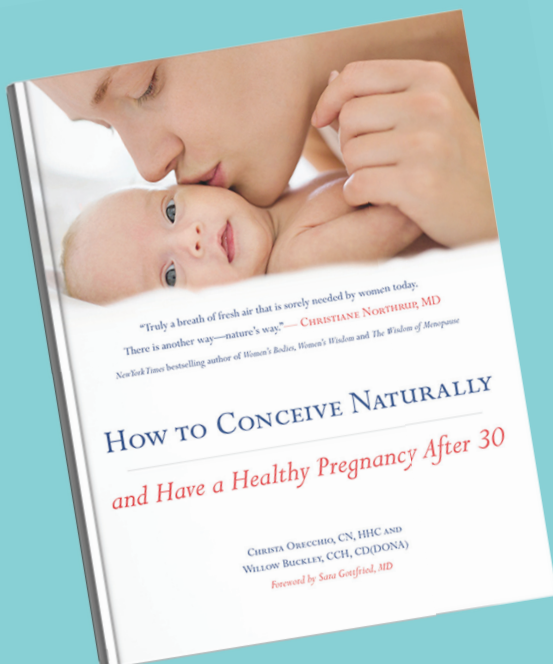
*You will discover that your health, happiness, and future of life on Earth
are rarely so much in your hands as when you sit down to eat.*

—JOHN ROBBINS, *Diet for a New America*



ADDRESSING COMMON FEARS

For many women, the biggest fear is that once you decide to try to get pregnant, you won't be able to. Or that it will be exceedingly difficult to do so, and you might have to resort to invasive and expensive procedures to try to increase your odds of successful conception. So that's a lot to worry about! And, of course, you know that stress makes it more difficult to pregnant, so you find yourself trying *really* hard *not* to feel stressed. Which doesn't work and makes the whole endeavor seem ridiculously frustrating and overwhelming. And you haven't even gotten to the fun part of procreation yet!



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