

## Bringing Up Baby



*From fertility yoga to procreation vacations, combating nature deficit disorder to hopping on the “lactivist” bandwagon — behold, the progressive parent’s path to familial bliss*

**By Jenny Rough**

I was recounting to a friend a conversation I’d recently had with my doctor. “He wants to put me on fertility pills,” I said.

My doctor described the medication like this: “Think of your eggs as tomatoes and the pills as fertilizer. The tomatoes are ripening, getting plenty of sunshine and water, which is good, but the fertilizer will add —” — Poison,” I chimed in, cutting him off.

“Nourishment,” he corrected.

“Well, can’t I use organic compost instead?” I asked.

If Hollywood is any indication, there’s a trend among silver screen teen protagonists and the twenty-something starlets who play them to get pregnant before their biological clocks even begin to tick. But in reality women are waiting longer to reproduce. I’m one of them. And although 86 percent of women know at least one couple that has had trouble conceiving, most are surprised by their own fertility struggles. Again, *moi*.

Putting parenting off for a few years isn’t the only hurdle would-be moms are facing; the 80,000 (and counting) chemicals we are exposed to in the United States (including fertilizers) also play a role. But having kids needn’t be a dirty business — in fact, it has been done for millennia without the help of in vitro fertilization, epidurals or, for that matter,

### Stocking a Fertility Fridge

Say YES to...

**Celery!** Juice it, snack on it, dice it and throw it in your lentil soup — celery is a good source of folic acid, healthy for you and your developing babe.

**Goji berries!** For a natural aphrodisiac, mix goji berries in with pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds and almonds for an injection of zinc, magnesium and vitamin E. Oysters, cloves and basil are other foods that enhance randy-ness.

**Raw Honey!** Sugar depresses the immune system and depletes the body of minerals. Use sweeteners sparingly, and when doing so, stick with raw honey, which is rich in iron and B vitamins.

Say NO to...

**Alcohol!** Alcohol has played a role in many (accidental) conceptions. But avoid it when trying to get pregnant. Alcohol is acidic and it can impair ovulation.

**Peas:** You’d think these would be a healthy addition to a fertility diet, but peas contain a natural contraceptive that’s more than a mouthful: m-xylohydroquinone. So skip ‘em (you still have to eat your broccoli though, and spinach, and kale, and beets hellip;).

**Soybean Oil:** Check the labels of the salad dressing in the health food stores — most contain soybean oil, which can inhibit fertility.

*Adapted from The Fertile Female by Julia Indichova (Adell Press, April 2007)*

fertility pills. And thankfully, for the millions of women out there like me who are struggling to create and raise a healthy family, there are more effective natural options emerging every day — to aid us along through conception and beyond. Whether you are still only daydreaming about your bundle-of-joy-to-be, tending a bun in the oven or caring for your gurgling babe, we hope the holistic approaches gathered on the following pages bring you closer to parental bliss. □

## A Pea in the Pod — Techniques for Conceiving, Naturally

» **Self-Healing Imagery:** Instead of looking to an acupuncturist, Chinese herbal formula or the yoga mat as holding the answer to fertility difficulties, Julia Indichova, author of *The Fertile Female* (Adell Press, 2007) and founder of [FertileHeart.com](http://FertileHeart.com), suggests women look within.

When Indichova had trouble conceiving, she visited conventional doctors, five acupuncturists, several homeopaths and a Native American medicine man. "After I ran out of money and was exhausted, I had an epiphany," she says. She realized she needed to heal *herself*, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually. A nightmare about a cancer in her uterus told her she had some inner obstacles to address.

Working with language, dream interpretation, and imagery, Indichova conceived. Now she leads workshops to teach others how imagery can change one's inner reality. "If a woman says, 'My insurance only covers three IVF cycles,' this may be someone who expects to be going through more than three IVF cycles," Indichova says. The woman might visualize bobbing in the ocean and washing away self-defeating language. "You can have the best of diets and work with the highest technology, but if there's an emotional conflict about pregnancy, that part of you has veto power."

» **Fertility Yoga:** Yoga calms the nervous system — good news for couples dealing with the stress of trying to conceive. As long as you're not looking to yoga to save you, certain asanas aid with fertility. For example, Reclining Bound Angle Pose will bring vitality and blood flow to the uterus, allowing the pelvic region to be awakened, says DC-based yoga instructor Sima Gerow. After making love, Legs Up the Wall pose uses gravity to encourage the movement of your partner's *prana* (meaning life force... or, loosely translated, semen). And Savasana? "Savasana is a beautiful pose because it teaches you to let go," says Gerow.

There are specific "yoga fertility" classes such as the ones Brenda Strong teaches at UCLA's Mind/Body Institute (check out her DVD at [yoga4fertility.com](http://yoga4fertility.com)) or Chicago's Pulling Down the Moon. If you do opt to attend such classes, remember yoga is about staying present. "You can do 1,000 hip openers, but if all you're thinking is *baby, baby, baby* you're obsessing over the future," says Gerow.

» **Procreation Vacations & Fertility Retreats:** Advice to "just relax" and take a vacation may not be new (34 years ago my parents followed doctor's orders to spend a weekend at The Greenbrier and here I am, writing this article). These days, however, hotels and resorts are putting together official packages, such as the Procreation Vacation at the Teton Lodge in Jackson Hole — a four night stay in a suite that includes day hikes, couples massages and candlelit dinners. Randine Lewis, author of *The Infertility Cure* (Little, Brown and Company, 2004), leads holistic fertility retreats with yoga, acupuncture, qi gong and cognitive restructuring. She believes in a "total immersion" program because "lifestyles today aren't conducive to the reproduction process." Lewis' retreats are structured in sets of three, each five days long, where couples look deeply at the areas of their life that need changing.

## Baby on Board — Holistic Support for a Healthy Pregnancy

» **Acupuncture:** Acupuncture has long been used to help infertility, and now women are continuing treatment after conception. Njemile Carol Jones, a licensed acupuncturist specializing in fertility says

this modality helps women in their first trimester who are experiencing morning sickness and vomiting. It can also boost energy to assist with the growth and development of the baby. "Women who have taken progesterone or been through IVF and conceived may experience lingering side effects," she says. "Acupuncture can help with bloating, constipation and headaches." With repeat miscarriage, Jones has seen acupuncture make a difference in carrying a baby to term. During childbirth itself, she's used acupuncture in early stages of labor when the cervix isn't dilating or the labor isn't progressing. "You can't force a baby to come until he or she is ready," says Jones, "but acupuncture can help harmonize the body's chi and relax a first time mom who's fearful of delivery."

» **Herbs:** Ginger by itself is useful to quell nausea, but Chinese herbs can be used for more serious pregnancy ailments, such as strengthening the mother's ability to hold a child inside. Some mothers-to-be simply want to forego over the counter meds and use herbs instead. But proceed with caution. The best course of action is to see a Chinese herbal practitioner with experience in this area. "Ask about their background," advises Jones. The practitioner will prepare a prescribed formula for a woman's particular condition. "Two women might come to me with so much nausea neither one can eat, but I'll create two different formulas depending on their history and health."

» **Hypnobirthing:** Maggie Heyn Richardson, freelance writer and mother of three, was looking for a better strategy to natural childbirth than just "toughing it out." Hypnobirthing — a method of self-hypnosis — seemed promising. It can't be picked up at the last minute, though — it requires practicing deep breathing, imagery and verbal affirmations for five months leading up to the due date. Richardson used a CD that included visualizations with each color of the rainbow working as a natural anesthesia for different parts of the body. "It seemed goofy at first, but I threw myself into it, because I think you have to believe it's going to work in order for it to actually work," she says. On delivery day she practiced further visualizations (blooming flowers, loosening silk ribbons) to help her body open naturally instead of using forced "pushing." The birthing process was still long — 21 hours — and not exactly pain-free, but she believes hypnobirthing made the experience more manageable.

### **Out of the Womb, Into the World — New Trends from Progressive Parent-Land**

» **Lactivism:** Seems like society should be smart enough to know breastfeeding is a natural way to nourish babies, and appreciate how mothers often have to make do with whatever pitiful "nursing station" is available. But recent controversies are throwing public breastfeeding into the media spotlight, proving some folks still just don't get it. In 2006 a woman was kicked off a Delta airlines flight for breastfeeding during a nighttime flight (this was after a three hour delay — and she was sitting in the back of plane). Last year a mother was told to stop breastfeeding her child in a commons area of a Ronald McDonald House charity where her baby was recovering from brain surgery.

In response, "lactivist" moms are staging "nurse-ins" at places known to remove breastfeeding mothers. Their message is hitting home; more states are moving to legislate protection for a mother's right to breastfeed, and workplaces, restaurants and other public spaces are establishing lactation rooms. Because breastfeeding boosts IQ, you can bet the upcoming generation will be smart enough to maintain and extend their mother's efforts.

» **Diaper-Free Babies:** Forget potty training your toddler — why not start 'em even younger? Primitive Mayan Indians didn't diaper their babies before placing them in carrying pouches — the babies were already potty trained. Now the idea is catching on in our culture. [DiaperFreeBaby.org](http://DiaperFreeBaby.org) hosts a community of parents who promote a natural approach to babies' bathroom needs. Much like reading a six-week-old's cues signaling it's time for food or a nap, parents read their baby's sounds and signs to rush him or her off to the potty; a process that has been dubbed "elimination communication." Imagine if all parents turned into "potty whisperers" — landfills would relieve themselves of the 27.4 billion disposable plastic diapers dumped there each year!

» **Nature Deficit Disorder:** Today's kids are wired, spending 44 hours a week connected to iPods, video games, TV and computers (not to mention Starbucks drinks, now popular among the tweener set). Richard Louv was so concerned with the divide between kids and the great outdoors that he wrote a book: *Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin Books, 2005). Rick Blaine, father of two preschoolers, read it and was shocked to learn that building tree forts can be illegal. Applying some of Louv's suggestions, he and his wife Amy take their kids wading in streams near their Northern Virginia home or out in the vegetable garden. The kids love observing animals, bugs and birds. The Blaines are part of a growing movement among parents and families who are introducing woods, fields and creeks as a playground. Let's hope the trend keeps going.

*While writing this article, Jenny Rough realized she needs to work through some inner obstacles of her own... preferably on a procreation vacation.*