



Healthy
Pregnancy
SUMMIT



Victoria Maizes, MD

How To Increase The Odds Of A Healthy Conception

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Hello everyone. I am Dr. Debby Hamilton, and I'm an integrated pediatrician and with a neurological Health Foundation, and today we are interviewing Dr. Victoria Maizes. She is executive director of the Andrew Weil center for integrative medicine, and a professor of medicine, Family Medicine and Public Health at the University of Arizona. She's also the editor of the Oxford University textbook, integrated women's health and the author be fruitful, Essential Guide to maximizing fertility and giving birth to healthy child. Welcome, Dr. Maizes. I will call you Victoria from now on. Thank you for joining us today.

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I'm delighted, thanks for inviting me.

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So today we're gonna go through a couple of questions, really, with the idea of today's target is to how to increase your odds of a healthy conception. So welcome. So in terms of healthy conception, how often are there problems with conception? So I guess we're talking about are the infertility issues How common is this?

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Well, you know, to Interesting thing because people throw out about 15% of couples will trouble



with conception, but it's very dependent on age as well. And one of the things that's happened in our modern society is that couples are choosing to delay childbearing. And that absolutely affects your fertility, especially for women, but also for men and importantly for men, it affects their ability to conceive a healthy child.

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Okay, what ages? Are you talking about? Women and men? Yeah,

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well, I mean, this is often surprising to people, but you're, you're at your most fertile probably when you're in your late teens and in your 20s. And there is some more challenge in conceiving once you hit 35 and then much more significantly at 40. And the reason that I think this is really important for Women to know is that we have all of these headlines of celebrities having babies when they're 48, or 49, or 50. And I feel like the implied message is take all the time you need for your career to find the perfect partner to have enough financial stability. And then if you should need some help, you can always have IVF and look at all the people who've done that. But, you know, the reality is, is that IVF while it is absolutely miraculous, and, you know, I think that Dr. Brown who got the Nobel Prize in Medicine for developing IBM deserved it. It's only successful about 20% of the time after age 40. So, I'm an insurance policy that only pays off one fifth of the time, you know, you sort of expect that your insurance policy is going to pay off every time and not just 20% of the time.

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Wow, okay, well definitely sounds like age is a common problem, the conception of what are the other problems that lead to

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the other major problem. The other main problem for women is obvious natori infertility, and that can be a really wide range of problems. pcls, which stands for polycystic ovarian syndrome is a very common reason. And in that situation, women's hormones are a bit off, and their ability to regulate their blood sugar's a bit off. And so they may have a little facial hair, their periods may not be as regular as you'd expect. They sometimes have a slightly higher blood pressure their, their blood lipid called the triglyceride may be a little elevated. So some of these things you might notice yourself like if you go Why am I having all these hairs on my chin? You'd have to go to the doctor to have measured to find out that they were a little but pcls is relatively common in our country. Being overweight affects fertility. Cigarettes affects fertility. And, you know, other things along those lines, endometriosis, I mean, there's a variety of things having your thyroid be abnormal, even and this is one of the common explanations for why people don't get



pregnant. A celiac disease, about 7% of women who don't conceive when they're tested. They have celiac disease, and that's where you have an autoimmune disease where you can't tolerate wheat or gluten. And the good news is you go off gluten, and suddenly, you are able to conceive. That's amazing.

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Now, are you seeing an increase in problems with consumption? I know there's an increase in PCLS. Yes.

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This is one of again, the things that's a little hard to pick apart. Because since women are delaying childbearing, it's hard to conceive. But there's other things that we think we have an obesity crisis in our country and it's hard to conceive if you're overweight. We have a lot of environmental toxins in our society. And some of these environmental toxins are what we call endocrine disrupting chemicals. And what that means is that they alter the normal function of hormones, including the hormones that help you conceive. We live in a really stressful world. And that's to affect fertility because like from an evolutionary biology perspective, your body would get the message, now's the time to focus on survival. You know, reproduction is a luxury that you have when everything is in balance and healthy and not too stressful. But if you're just trying to survive, it's the wrong time to reproduce because it would affect your survival. And so your body tamps down your fertility,

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right, and that makes sense. So if a couple is trying to get pregnant, what is kind of a normal time period for them to conceive?

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Yes. So again, it's a little age dependent. First of all we want people to know, are they having signs of normal fertility? So in women, that would be regular menstrual periods and the length can vary. They could be regular at 27 day cycle, they could be regular 35 day cycle, there's not like a magic everyone should have 28 day cycle like birth control pill it right, that's okay. But it's good to know that you oscillate 14 days before your period. So sometimes people think, Oh, I'm most fertile when I oscillate, which is when an egg is released from the tube. And that's true. When do I feel like people have this idea day 14, but they often count forward, and you actually round backwards, but you can't count backwards. Regular cycle, you know, like if your cycle is 32 days, for example, then you'd subtract 14 from 32 and unite with you that you'd oscillate around 18. And that's when you want to have Sexual intercourse. So some of the answer is, are you actually having sexual intercourse? Are you having it around the time of ovulation? And then if that's true, most women in their 20s and early 30s will conceive within four months,



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four months, okay?

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We tell women not to worry if they're under 35 for up to a year, a year goes by and you don't conceive, then we say we should really do some evaluation to figure out why. But if you're over 35, we tell you to only wait six months. And that's because age is really a factor and want to get help you in whatever ways we may need to help you sooner rather than later. And if you're over 40, we tell you to only try for three months.

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So even though

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conceive as you're older, we don't want to waste time if we do need to get involved in some way.

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Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

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So what about many women are The birth control pill. And obviously that is altering your hormones, and I haven't had normal cycles. So do you need to wait a certain period? But before getting pregnant?

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Yeah, you know, I would say that this is a very interesting question for integrators and doctors to discuss because if you look at the conventional wisdom, there wouldn't be a recommendation to wait. There would be you stop the pill, and then you know, somewhere in the next weeks, or maybe two to three months, you'll just start having normal cycles again, but we all know that those women get pregnant on the pill, especially if you know, and so they get pregnant as soon as they go off the pill. So having said that, I believe in preparation, and I think that there is a period of preparation where you can eat a really healthy diet and you can minimize any exposure to environmental toxins, and you can manage your stress and so I like the idea of People going off the pill and doing all they can to kind of get themselves in order so that they can have a really healthy child. But that doesn't mean they might not conceive right away if they're not using

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any other form of birth control. Right? That makes sense. Yeah. Cuz I always said like a woman



can actually takes can take up to a year to really get her cycle back.

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That is a possibility. But usually, it's less Now, the other interesting thing about the pill is that women are going on the pill when they're girls, you know, they go when they're in their teens because they have irregular periods and they don't want to be surprised or because they have

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acne, but I say acne a lot of girls to me.

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Absolutely. And you know, when you have a young woman who comes in and says I want to go on this route my skin and she's 13 you know, some part of your head is also thinking and she won't have an unwanted pregnancy

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preventative medicine

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right? Exactly So So then she may not know she has pcls she may not know she has some underlying problem because she's been on the pill instead of recognizing that there's something amiss. And so being on the pill can actually mask the fact that there is something else going on. And I think that's some of why you don't see a return to normal periods because there was never normal periods to begin with, actually.

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Right. And you think about some women, if they're not going to conceive to the 35. They've been on birth control pill for like 20 years,

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and that's obviously got effect. I mean, you know, the birth control pill has some positives, obviously, giving control of reproduction to women is a huge positive, avoid unintended pregnancy, which can be incredibly stressful and challenging and all sorts of ways. It helps reduce the risk of ovarian cancer so that's okay. There is still a question and it's unclear, but perhaps it does very slightly increase the risk of breast cancer. So that's what we know long term. But I do acknowledge that the birth control pill is an endocrine disrupting chemical. Like it Yes. opps what would be a normal cycle? And so right, you know, I do think that you know, when people are younger, and maybe not as, and this isn't a slam young people, because some



will be very conscientious, but the way in which it might be a better tool when you're really young, and then maybe as you get a little older, there would be other birth control strategies that you would switch to. So I don't like the idea of someone being on it for 20 years. I don't think we know that it's dangerous to be on it for a short amount of time, you know, for it's a great, it's a great advance in medicine, and downsides. It also can increase the risk of depression in some way and it can reduce libido. And that's interesting. You might be happy about that. But yeah, someone is 25 and married and has no libido and is wondering why think maybe it's the birth control pill.

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Hmm, that's interesting. Yeah, I wouldn't have thought about that. Okay, so what about I also think about if you look at pregnancy timing, like more than one pregnancy, there is an increased risk of having a child with more developmental needs, that the pregnancies are close. Correct. So do you have any ideal recommendations about how to space pregnancies?

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Well, what I've seen and you're probably more of an expert on this than I am is two years to reduce autism, that there is some suggestion that that would be what it would take and again, you know, if you're thinking about a women's bodies and their health, pregnancy is taxing, you're essentially giving to this development. fetus and baby through breastfeeding your nourishment, you're preferentially giving them your omega three fatty acids out of your body, your calcium, you know, you're giving to your baby, everything that it needs for its survival. So you do want a period of time where you replenish yourself. And so spacing pregnancy, I think is a good idea.

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Right? Because I also think it's not just pregnancy, but if you have pregnancy, and then you're nursing, right, even more calories just for nursing, but that's still taxes in your body. So that could be one to two years, just that period. Correct. You know, so I feel like, you're right after you know, I've had a couple kids and you really feel like need to, kind of regain your strength and you don't sleep. And that just makes logical sense. So since we're talking about increasing the odds and healthy conception, what about for what could a woman do in terms of increasing conception, then the men are not off the hook will talk to you.

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So I think for women, there are many things that can Do and I did write a book about this. So just shameless plug, I wrote a book called be fruitful, the Essential Guide to maximizing fertility and giving birth to a healthy child. And it'll go in more detail than we can go in today about the foods to eat, how to manage stress, what what supplements to take, how much exercise to do.



What about your spiritual life? Should you ever use traditional Chinese medicine? Or are your VEDA? What are the roles for those kinds of things? And so that's in greater detail. But the reality is, is that as you're preparing to conceive, you want to be as healthy as possible to have a healthy child, and we don't live in a particularly healthy world. So what I look like, there is really strong evidence from a many large studies that are part of the nurses health study that show that eating a Mediterranean style diet is associated with increased fertility. So your chances of having a baby are better if and that's a very healthy diet. We know it helps prevent heart disease and cancer and depression and Alzheimer's. So there's a lot of strong evidence to support that. So that's a diet that has more vegetables and fruits, legumes, fish, and you know, we have to talk about which are the fish that are right. No mercury fish, it has some dairy but the dairy is more as yogurt and cheeses and a little less is straight milk. It's lower in glycemic index. So that means you're not eating a lot of Captain Crunch or cheering, not cereals that bump up your blood sugar, right, that are more whole grains and that are going to keep your sugars much more even. So those are some of the principles there's also less meat in the Mediterranean diet. And that may be different for people. I really, really encourage people to eat organic at this point in their lives. think that it's the best way we have of reducing the environmental toxins that we take in through food. And a lot of the toxins are actually rapidly eliminated from our body not all but a lot. I also recommend avoiding plastic because the Bisphenol A that's in plastic, or in the lining of cans or in thermal receipts, within a few days, you eliminate it, but we get exposed so much. So that the environmental change you could make, you don't want to stand behind any idling buses you don't want to get. That's, you know, again, in our environment. There are vitamins so for example, all of the major societies, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the United States, services public so sorry, the US the United States Preventive Services Task Force, all recommend that women take folic acid Some say a premium NATO vitamin with folic acid. And that reduces the risk of having a child with autism by association anyway, it reduces the risk of miscarriage. And it actually helps women conceive more easily. So there are supplements that are beneficial. You want to be sure you have iodine. So if you're a foodie, and you only do human Himalayan sea salt, you know, you want iodized salt. So there's a lot of things that people can do that actually help them conceive, but also increase the odds of the baby being healthy.

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Right? And in terms of things like prenats, do you have a sense of how much before you try for conception? Yeah, you recommend?

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Well, all those societies say it should be women of childbearing age. And the reason is, I'd states half of pregnancies are unplanned,



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unplanned,

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unplanned pregnancy and you weren't on a prenatal vitamin, then you find out weeks into the pregnancy and you've lost some the chance to prevent neural tube defect. And so we're to reduce the possibility of autism. So for sure, it would be good for all women to be taking folic acid and maybe a prenatal. So I like to really have this conversation with all of the women I see. But if you're just someone who's like, I want to take it right before the four months before, because that's when the clock starts to develop, and the egg is slowly released. And interestingly enough, there is a benefit to men to taking a multivitamin. They don't want to take a prenatal because they don't need iron. So Right, right, the an iron men would have a formulation without iron, but in men spermatogenesis, which means making new sperm takes about four months. So actually, it's about the same time period, that you really, really want to be sure that men and women are taking a supplement.

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That's great. Yeah, that makes a lot of sense what about exercise? You know what's enough, but not too much, not about balance.

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Well, it's so interesting that you say that not too much. Because you know, I have to say as a doctor most of my life, I'm trying to get people to do more.

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Right? more exercise. Right? What

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else? Me they run marathons, I think good for you. How cool is that? Yeah, not if they're trying to conceive, right? This is the exception to the rule. The exception is that there can be a too much. So we know walking is great. If you walk every day for 30 minutes. That's great. Running, you know, there was some evidence to suggest that vigorous exercise can actually interfere with conception, unless you're overweight, if you're overweight. And that may be because people who are overweight have a little more of a pcls kind of picture. And when they lose weight, they help regulate their blood sugar's better. And so with the exception of overweight folks, you want to be doing moderate exercise and not vigorous exercise. So that means no spinning class, no marathon Bikram yoga where you're in a room that's really hot. Right? You only have to kind of back off and do mild to moderate exercise.



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Right. As I said, I live near Boulder, Colorado. And so what moderate and, you know, exercise are the different than most people's. Yeah, our exercise.

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I think that's true. And you know, I don't automatically tell people don't exercise if they, you know, they've been like a runner their whole life. But if they come in, and they say they've had trouble conceiving, then I back off.

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Yeah. What about other stress management or things like yoga, which I think are extras? Also, stress management?

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Yeah. Well, as I said earlier, from the evolutionary biology perspective, if you're really stressed, your body has the message, wrong time to conceive. And then when in men, it'll tamp down the reproductive hormones. So it's really great. And this is something in my clinical practice, I always ask people, how do you manage stress and Sometimes they say, Well, I watch TV, or I go shopping. And those are lovely activities. And they may be relaxing activities, right? Not actually tone, the relaxing side of the nervous system. And so I like people to do something that tones the vagal nerve, the relaxing side of the nervous system. So that could be yoga. It could be Tai Chi, which are both active forms, movement forms of relaxation. It could be meditation, it could be guided imagery, it could be breath work, some people do mindful walking, and that's okay. So there's a really wide range, but essentially, you want to get into that zone, that relaxation zone. And there's lots of tools these days, there's free apps that I often

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I have things to help

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you figure out how to do it.

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Yeah, that's great. What about men, but the men need to know you did mention they need their own kind of prenatal. Yeah,

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yeah. Well, I often left out of the picture. And of course, you know, half of the genetics are coming from the dad. And so, well, age isn't as important to factor. And you know, I had one



couple of my practice where the man was in his 80s. And they had a baby together. 80? Yes, his wife was much younger. Let's just say that. But we know if you want to have a healthy child, that after age 45 men have father, children who have an increased risk of autism have bipolar disease have learning disabilities. And so it really is beneficial for men also to pay attention to age as a factor in their fertility. The diet that many most men don't eat. five servings of fruits and veggies really want to include men in type that that healthy Mediterranean style diet. And actually there have been studies that looked at in vitro fertilization. And they're your, your, you know, affecting every bit of the reproductive physiology. And still, when the couple the man and the woman eats Mediterranean style diet, they have a higher likelihood of conceiving using IVF. So diet is important, it's interesting and make healthier sperm, which means larger numbers and also more normal sperm when they eat a Mediterranean style diet when they eat more walnuts when they take a vitamin that has zinc in it and antioxidant vitamins like vitamin A and E and C and the mineral Selenium. So all of these things also affect male fertility. I worry in men about the electromagnetic field that they're carrying around. Men carry their cell phone in there, I

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was wondering about that

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right next to their genitals and that affects the normalcy of the sperm. So get that cell phone further away. You know, don't carry it in your pocket anymore on your belt. I worry about laptops on the lap. How many Marijuana marijuana has become legal in so many states. And it can be very useful in some situations, but not when you're trying to conceive a child because it affects the sperm. We don't actually know how it affects the eggs. Those are harder to study that sperm but we actually know that it affects the sperm the sperm and creates fewer Normal sperm.

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Right? I mean, that makes a lot of sense for men.

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What's that? It's a lot of cleanup work for men to

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about to say the men on off the hook. People are like, Oh, how does a woman get ready, but the man has to get ready to you know, just make sense.

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And when people are being tested, men should be tested first, because it's very easy to do what's called a semen analysis on a man to be sure that the counts are high enough. You know,



other than just, for example, a woman getting an ovulation kit to check and see if she's ovulating. The other tests on women are relatively invasive. So you first want to test the man with that very non invasive test and be sure that he's producing sperm Before you go down the line have lots and lots of testing on the woman.

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Okay, that makes sense. What about any other toxins? I do worry about just the impact of emf center, obviously back to fertility, but also our children. I feel like we're doing lots of experiments with our environment at the moment. But

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yeah, I found it really true. And I just got to put in a plea that you know, any moms listening, any doctors who take care of kids, you know, don't let them play with the cell phone, the cell phones become a toy. And you know, that's just having that. I think if you put it on airplane mode, it's okay. Because then it doesn't have the frequencies coming in and out. with older kids texting is way better than having it up against their head. Kids skulls are not as dense. And so we know that that field is penetrating deeper into the brain and probably much more worrisome. They're still developing their nervous system. Again, that increases the risk. So it's, it's something We really want to pay attention but of course, EMF electromagnetic field is not the only risk we talk about all the toxins in our food in our water in the products we use. So for example, how's your sunscreen, right? shampoo, your moisturizer, your conditioner, hair gel, hopefully not hair spray. Right is they're making perfumes for kids. Now, those fragrances artificial fragrance is an endocrine disrupting chemical unless it's a an essential oil. And even those lavender a little boys will lead to the development of breast because we're breast buds at least because it's an endocrine disrupting chemical. So there's a lot of work to be done, but it's doable. I mean, we can use stainless steel or glass instead of plastic. We can water filter system in our sinks or on a refrigerator it comes to the refrigerator and drink That water preferentially, we can do organic. And when organic is expensive, we can use what's called the Dirty Dozen and the clean 15. And I want to put out a shout for the Environmental Working Group, which is a nonprofit that has tons of this information for free, really well vetted on their website, it's ewg.org, the Environmental Working Group, great resource if you want to dive deeper, and think about how to clean up your home or your children's lives, or before you can see,

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right well, I very much agree with that. And I recommend that to patients. And the longer I'm in in medicine more I really for organic foods, and you really start to see all the different ways we're exposed. But those are some great things to think about your food, your water, you know, what you put on your body, how you clean your house, those kind of things, basically, but those



are all that's great recommendations. So do you have any other recommendations, anything else that I haven't asked you or that you're just Thank, you know, people need to hear.

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Well, you've asked me a great set of questions. I also because of the integrative background like to ask people about their spiritual lives, there is this perspective that you could call the mystical perspective, which is that to create a human life takes male female and God or you know, that other other outside force that we have no control over. And we live in a religious nation and lots of religions actually have prayers that help conception have rituals. And so, you know, I like to ask people that because sometimes when people are going through a challenging time, that's where their source of strength is, and and also the ways in which religious organizations often offer social support and community. And so I think that can be useful as well. And then when people are struggling, if I Where the health care czar of this country, which I'm not traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture available because I think that that is a very different approach that can help nourish and replenish the system, and often can help people conceive when they've been having trouble. So I'd like people to know that you save, they've done all these things and the power of the synergism of paying attention to your diet, your supplements, your stress management, the environmental toxins is really powerful. But sometimes you need a little extra help. And that extra help could be advanced reproductive technologies, like I have for something else along the way. Clomid, which induces isolation, intrauterine insemination, there are other things and they're wonderful, but a lower tech less invasive first step unless you're like 42, and you just got to do that basic things right? I would say is to think about Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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Yeah, that's great. That's great. Yeah, I knew. I do know they help a lot with a lot of hormone management, stress management, too, I think Exactly.

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Yeah. Yeah.

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Well, that's great. I don't know if I have any other comments. You've been wonderful. Thank you so much for, you know, joining me today a lot of great information. I learned something. I always love learning things. So. And I think we have all the information. So thank you very much. And thank you, everyone for listening today.

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It's my pleasure. Thanks for interviewing me.



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You're welcome. Bye bye.

