

Let's Spring into Spring!

Green light for the Green's when it comes to health and fertility!

By Sue Bedford (MSc Nutritional Therapy)



If you have ever wondered why plant foods look so colourful and appealing to the eye – it is due to the gorgeous pigments that they contain – no wonder they are so attractive to the bees and other pollinator insects! Some of these pigments also help to protect the plants from invaders too. Spring is on it's way and it is lovely to see buds and trees starting to burst out in green. Ever told when you were young to eat your greens and wondered why?

It's because green foods are packed with vital nutrients and the health benefits from green plants are from the phytonutrients which help protect the plant itself. Green plants contain a lot of these phytonutrients in the form of polyphenols, flavonoids, nitrates, folate, chlorophyll, phytosterols, catechins, isoflavones – that is just a few!

Some examples of Healthy Green Fruit and Vegetables for you to try

Broccoli, Kale, Romaine lettuce, Collard greens, Bok Choy, celery, Brussels sprouts, Green grapes, Green apples, Pears, Olives, Asparagus, Spinach, Swiss chard, Green beans, Peas, Courgettes, Kiwi fruit, Avocado, Edamame

How do Green Fruit and Veg help our general health?

Green coloured fruits and vegetables are some of the healthiest foods you can eat. They help support the immune system, help detoxify the body, restore energy and vitality and have been linked in studies to reducing the risk of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and mental decline. Greens have long been known to help with the formation of blood and the proper functioning of the circulatory system in the body.

And what about fertility?

Green vegetables are low in fat, high in fibre, and an excellent source of vitamins A, C and K, potassium and magnesium, nitrates and folate and so are a key colour to include plenty of in your diet when TTC.

They are packed full of antioxidants which have an important role in the body as the zap free radicals (molecules which contain oxygen but have an uneven number of electrons, which makes them unstable. So, they travel around the body hunting for another electron to pair up with, making them highly reactive and leading to oxidation) which can lead to oxidative stress of cells including egg and sperm cells, leading to premature ageing of the cells.

There is also increasing evidence from research to suggest that green vegetables, algae, tea, along with certain grasses and seeds (to name a few) are now linked to improving reproductive health. A study published in Nature Communications in 2013 found that fathers with a diet deficient in folate were more likely to have offspring with abnormalities of the head, face and sternum (breastbone) and a build- up of fluid on the brain. This study was conducted on mice but the importance of folate in preventing neural tube defects is well known prior to conception and in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and is why women are advised to take a daily folate/folic acid supplement of 400 micrograms if planning to get pregnant. This is because the brain and spinal cord form in the first few weeks of pregnancy. The authors of the study say that the changes they found were specifically in the sperm epigenome – the chemical compounds that tell the genes which proteins to make and which to switch off. They concluded that this indicates that the diet of men may be as important as that of women in the months before conception. In addition, a study published in 2001 in the Journal of Fertility and Sterility found that low levels of folic acid in men were linked with low sperm counts and less active sperm.

The vitamin C obtained from green vegetables and fruit is important when it comes to male fertility as it has been shown in studies with sperm motility and quality (as it is an antioxidant it helps prevent damage to DNA). In females it is thought to help the endocrine system balance oestrogen and progesterone more effectively and so aid ovulation. Folate is important in preventing neural tube defects in the foetus and the iron found in green vegetables helps to promote oxygen levels in cells, organs and the developing foetus.

Here are a few recipe ideas for you to try.....

Gorgeous Green Soup

Makes 2 portions

The consistency of this easy green nutritious soup can be adjusted accordingly to how you like it depending upon the amount of water you add and to make it creamy add a dash of coconut milk.

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 2 tablespoons diced onion
- 1 inch of fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 300g (4 cups) fresh broccoli, cut up into small pieces
- 225g (½lb) fresh spinach leaves
- 3 sticks of celery, chopped
- A handful of fresh chopped parsley
- Fresh water, adjust as required
- Sea salt and ground pepper, to taste
- A splash of Lemon or lime juice
- Splash of coconut milk (optional)

How to make

1. Using a large pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat and stir in the garlic, onion, and ginger too. Next, add the chopped broccoli, spinach, celery and parsley, and stir. Add enough water to cover the vegetables.
2. Bring to the boil, and then reduce the heat to a medium simmer. Cook for 15 minutes, or until the vegetables have softened. Add a splash of coconut milk if desired.
3. Use a blender/hand blender to purée the soup.
4. Season with salt and pepper and a squeeze of lemon or lime.

The Gorgeous Green fertility Juice

Why not make this yourself a 'Gorgeous Green fertility juice' – packed full of anti-inflammatory ingredients, fertility and immune supporting nutrients and a good blast of those 'B' vits including folate. This juice not only tastes great but in addition will aid digestive transit too. Green drinks get their vibrant colour from chlorophyll, a nutrient-rich pigment found in all leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, celery and lettuce, that cleans the body of harmful toxins, oxygenates the blood and helps boost energy levels.

Ingredients – try to use organic wherever possible

3/4 pint glass of water

1 handful of grated carrot

1 handful of kale

1 green apple, cored and chopped

1 pear, cored and chopped

Juice of half a lemon

1 piece of ginger (size according to taste)

3 sticks of celery

10 ice cubes

How to make:

Add the water, carrot and spinach to the blender. Blend until smooth.

Then add the celery, apple and pear. Finally add the ginger, lemon juice and ice cubes and blend together. Enjoy!

Sue is a Nutritional Therapist specialising in Fertility, Women's Health and General Wellness. She works closely with IVF Babble, IVF Babble Africa and Emme Menopause Magazine. There are lots of recipes and nutrition articles over on IVF Babble written by Sue in the wellness section- www.ivfbabble.com and also www.emmemagazine.com

Sue is able to offer remote Nutritional Therapy consultations. If you would like more information, do take a look at her website www.suebedfordnutrition.co.uk or send her an email sbnutrition@btinternet.com

Want to read more?

Lambrot, R., Xu, C., Saint-Phar, S. et al. Low paternal dietary folate alters the mouse sperm epigenome and is associated with negative pregnancy outcomes. *Nat Commun* 4, 2889 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms3889>

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