

Modifiable lifestyle factors in ART: What works and what women want

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The body of research on the relationship between fertility and lifestyle factors (including diet, weight, exercise, supplements, sleeping habits, physical and psychological stress, drugs and alcohol, medications and most recently environmental toxin exposure) is growing. Though there are conflicting data for some factors, others have been clearly shown to confer either detrimental or positive effects on ART treatments. Research tells us 71% of ART patients in the US are influenced by fertility information found on the internet, much of which is related to the lifestyle factors that could enhance their treatment outcome. With so much emotional, physical and financial stress weighted on the success of ART treatments, patients are eagerly seeking out information, support and advisory about any, even marginal, opportunities to improve their reproductive health. The wrong information can be damaging and the right information, when applied correctly, can be beneficial. Understanding assumptions regarding the effect of lifestyle factors on ART success may better allow physicians to counsel patients about outcomes. And, indeed, understanding the best and most recent evidence on lifestyle factors and how patients can implement changes most effectively may help improve those outcomes. Supporting patients in this way through diagnosis and treatment is critical, as both psychological stress and physiological lifestyle factors may affect conception. ART patients cite disappointment with clinics that provide little, nominal, partially informed and/or conflicting information about the lifestyle modifications within the patients' control. Patients would be more likely to opt for treatment at a clinic where thorough counselling on lifestyle factors is offered versus one that does not and more likely to recommend that clinic. How information on lifestyle factors is delivered is critical. According to fertility education research, fertility education does improve fertility knowledge and optimality of fertility plans, but it can produce unnecessary worry. It should be created and offered in such a way to minimize negative effects and maximize effectiveness.

Biography

Brittany Hawkins and Catherine Hendy are communications specialists and authors focused on enhancing the ART patient experience and outcome. Brittany started her career in advertising as a communication strategist for Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco. Bridging the gap between data and digital media, she managed campaigns for blue-chip companies and organizations such as Hyundai, Adobe, and Got Milk? Before co-founding digital and experiential ventures across both South Africa and Silicon Valley's startup worlds. Brittany has a communications BA from DePauw University, ranked in the top tier of national liberal arts colleges and has lectured at the University Of Cape Town Graduate School Of Business. Catherine is a former BBC producer, with many years experience creating dynamic TV, radio and digital content for such outlets as HARD talk, The Andrew Marr Show and the World Service. Drawn to using digital skills to improve lives, she has lived and worked in communications for NGOs in South Africa and Sierra Leone and produced events for TEDx. Catherine has a BA (Hons) from King's College London, a post-grad in Law and has lectured at School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

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