

Excerpt

## **Conquering Infertility**

*Dr. Alice Domar's Mind/Body Guide*

*To Enhancing Fertility and Coping with Infertility*

### **Chapter 1: Infertility, Stress, and Depression**

When I logged on to my computer this morning, I took a quick look at my E-mail and found the usual collection of messages: a memo from a co-worker, a meeting reminder, a note from my sister, some junk-mail peddling stock tips that could make me rich—I wish! Then I saw a message from my good friend Cathy. The subject line, “BAD NEWS,” jumped out at me, so I opened the message and read it immediately.

“Got my period this morning. ☹!”

Her message was just five words—six if you include the doodad—and yet it told me so much. Even though Cathy didn't say, “I feel so depressed!” or “What are we doing wrong?” or “Why is this happening to us?” I knew she was probably thinking these things. I knew that she most likely had cried her eyes out when those first few drops of blood of her period appeared, and that it probably took all the energy she could summon just to drag herself to work. And I know that if she sees a pregnant woman today, or hears a baby cry, or glimpses a picture of

an infant on a co-worker's desk, her tears will return. When she gets home from work tonight she's likely to snap at her husband, skip her workout, and spend the rest of the evening on the couch numbing herself with junk food and junk TV, trying to forget how bitterly disappointed she is that yet another month has gone by and she's still not pregnant.

I know this because I've seen it happen thousands of times.

Being unable to get pregnant is one of the most stressful things a woman can go through. Until you start trying – and failing – to get pregnant, you assume that if and when you want children, you'll have them. We're all like that. As little girls we rock dolls in our arms and pretend to be mommies. As we grow up and become sexually active, we walk a shaky tightrope, assuming that the slightest slip could plunge us into an unwanted pregnancy. Yet we also feel completely confident that if we are smart about contraception, we'll maintain complete control of when we will or won't get pregnant – we believe that it's all solidly in our own hands.

As newlyweds, we think about when we'll start "trying," and we chat endlessly with girlfriends and sisters about whether it's better to give birth in spring or summer, and which we'd rather have first, a girl or a boy. Then, once we finally

do go off the pill or toss aside the diaphragm or leave the condoms in the nightstand drawer and set out to make a baby, it's nothing but fun. A little champagne, some candles, some sexy lingerie, and after a few thrilling nights of unprotected lovemaking, we fully expect to be well on our way to a darling little baby. "After all, I don't shoot blanks," our husbands boast playfully. And as we wait for that first period not to arrive, we smile conspiratorially at women with babies and then march confidently off to the drugstore for a pregnancy test, happily anticipating a plus sign.

And then, for some women, nothing happens.

So you try again—but with the tiniest sliver of worry. You may pay more attention to the calendar and plan some extra mid-cycle sex. You nix the champagne and pop a few extra vitamins instead. But still, the next month, nothing happens. So you buy ovulation kits and cut out caffeine and ask friends for advice. You may exercise less (or more), eat less (or more), and insist that your husband wear boxers instead of briefs—and tough luck if they feel bunched. Deal with it, you think. You wonder whether you should make an appointment with your OB/GYN, or perhaps even a reproductive endocrinologist. You fixate over what you could possibly be doing wrong. You have sex constantly. And yet, the pregnancy test always shows that dreaded minus sign, never a plus.

Getting pregnant can start to become an obsession. As you fail to conceive cycle after cycle after cycle, your anxieties may begin to haunt you, as negative thoughts loop endlessly through your mind. The content of those negative thoughts differs from woman to woman, but they're all related, a laundry list of "should haves" and "shouldn't haves." *We should have started trying earlier. I shouldn't have drunk so much in college. My husband shouldn't have experimented with pot. I shouldn't have had an abortion in my 20s. I should have taken better care of myself.* Eventually, your relationship with your husband starts to suffer. The thrill of frequent sex has worn off, and when your husband comes home from work, exhausted, on day 12 of your cycle, you tell him that you don't care *how* tired he is, he's doing it tonight if it kills him. You're panicked about not being able to conceive, but he's laid-back. *Don't worry, he tells you. It will happen. Just relax and stop obsessing about it.* But you can't.

Then your best friend gets pregnant. She calls, all excited, prattling on and on about the names she's picked out and the darling crib she wants to buy and how excited her parents were to find out they're going to be grandparents. You pretend to be happy for her, but deep down inside, you're insanely jealous, and you can't get off the phone fast enough. You're wracked with guilt. You find

yourself avoiding her and everyone else who has children. You just can't bear facing them.

You are stressed out. You may feel depressed, anxious, or angry. You might have trouble concentrating at work, and you may even cry every day. You begin to wonder if you'll ever have a baby, and if you'll ever be happy again.

But you can be. I'll show you how, whether you've been trying to get pregnant for six months or six years.