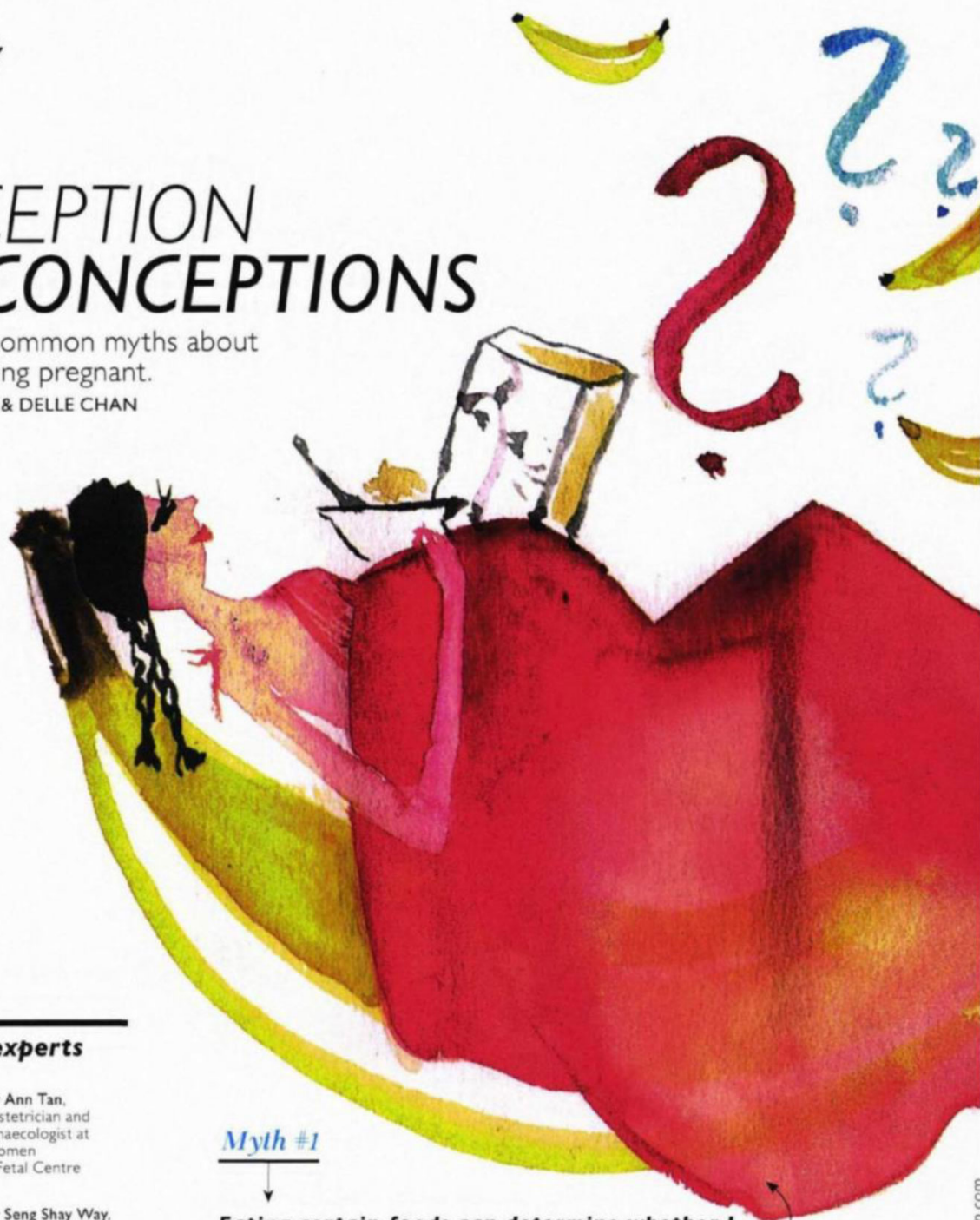


CONCEPTION MISCONCEPTIONS

We debunk 12 common myths about fertility and getting pregnant.

BY SASHA GONZALES & DELLE CHAN



Our experts



Dr Ann Tan,
obstetrician and
gynaecologist at
Women
& Fetal Centre



Dr Seng Shay Way,
specialist in
obstetrics and
gynaecology at
Raffles Fertility
Centre



Dr Alex Doo,
honorary consultant
of Matilda
International
Hospital, and director
of The IVF Clinic and
The Women's Clinic,
Hong Kong

Myth #1

Eating certain foods can determine whether I have a boy, a girl, or twins.

Some people believe that you should consume yams if you want to have twins, a lot of veggies if you want a girl, and more potatoes and bananas if you want a boy.

None of this is true, says Dr Seng Shay Way, specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology at Raffles Fertility Centre. "It's an old wives' tale that foods high in calcium and magnesium will lead to the conception of a girl, and that foods rich in potassium will lead to the conception of a boy. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that eating yams will give you twins." If you are trying to fall pregnant, you should follow a healthy and well-balanced diet so that you don't miss out on any important nutrients.



Myth #2

My husband's health, weight, and drinking and lifestyle habits don't affect our ability to have a baby.

Your husband's health is important because it impacts the quality of his sperm, says Dr Ann Tan, obstetrician and gynaecologist at Women & Fetal Centre. His weight, overall health, diet, stress levels and lifestyle habits therefore influence your chances of having a baby.

Myth #3

Eating or abstaining from certain foods can improve my chances of conceiving.

You may have heard that drinking too much coffee is associated with infertility, but there is no evidence to confirm this link, says Dr Seng. "It's generally considered safe to consume 200-300mg of caffeine daily while trying to conceive," he points out.

Conversely, consuming antioxidant-rich foods will not help boost your fertility. "Free radicals, which are the waste products from your cells, may be toxic to eggs and sperm. As such, many women believe that a diet rich in antioxidants – which reduce the oxidative stress brought on by these free radicals – can improve fertility. However, evidence to support this is currently limited," says Dr Seng.

Myth #4

Using lubricant during sex will not affect my chances of getting pregnant.

In general, lubricants might adversely affect the sperm, although there are special formulations that do not, says Dr Alex Doo, honorary consultant of Matilda International Hospital, and director of The IVF Clinic and The Women's Clinic in Hong Kong. So read the label on the product carefully before using it.

Myth #5

Some of the women in my family had kids in their 40s – so I should be able to conceive in my 40s too.

No two women are the same in this aspect, so what worked for the other women in your family may not work for you. "Do not take your fertility for granted. Each one of us is created differently, so just because they had no difficulty conceiving in their 40s, does not mean that you will fall pregnant easily at that age, too," says Dr Tan.

A woman's fertility starts declining rapidly from the age of 37, so if you want to have a baby, your best bet is to start trying well before this age.

Myth #6

I conceived my first baby easily, so the next pregnancy should be a breeze.

This is not always true, says Dr Doo. You are older the second time around, so age might be a factor in whether or not you conceive. Other factors may also have changed since, or you may have just been lucky the first time around.

Myth #7

Lifting my legs up after having sex will help me to conceive.

It's a common belief that this will encourage semen flow into your cervix. But there's really no need for you to do anything at all. In fact, your best bet would be to lie still for a while, says Dr Tan.

"Simply staying in a horizontal position for about 30 minutes would allow the semen to pool in your cervix, and from here, the sperm are in a good position to make their way upwards," she explains.





Myth #8

I should have sex on the 14th day of my menstrual cycle, which is when I ovulate.

While it is true that you should time intercourse around your ovulation to increase your chances of conceiving, fertility windows differ from woman to woman. "Not everyone has a 28-day cycle, so having sex on the 14th day of your cycle isn't always optimal," says Dr Seng. Typically, ovulation takes place about two weeks before your period, so if you have a 32-day cycle, you can expect to ovulate around day 18.

Myth #11

I can raise my chances of being pregnant if I track my temperature.

Tracking your temperature can help define when you are ovulating and let you know when you are fertile, but it isn't foolproof and is quite difficult to do correctly, Dr Doo says. Ovulation prediction kits are easier to use and more accurate.

Myth #12

I should keep trying for at least a year before seeking fertility help.

According to Dr Doo, the medical definition of infertility is the failure to get pregnant within one year despite regular intercourse without contraception. However, if there are other known issues, such as ovulation problems or poor sperm quality, you should seek help as soon as possible.

Furthermore, if you are older than 35, you should seek fertility help after six months of trying, and if you're over 40, get help after trying for three months, as success is very much dependent on age.

"Getting checked for any problems early is always wise," Dr Tan adds. "It may not mean that you require help. It could just be that you need reassurance and some pointers." SH

Myth #9

It takes a long time to get pregnant after stopping birth-control pills.

Not necessarily, says Dr Tan, as some women are immediately fertile once they stop taking the Pill. Dr Doo agrees. "Research has shown that 50 per cent of women fall pregnant within the first three months of stopping the Pill, and most fall pregnant within a year."

Myth #10

If my hubby has had a child in the past, he can't be the reason we are infertile now.

"This is not always true, as male fertility changes over time," says Dr Doo. "In fact, about one-third of fertility problems are due to male factors. A simple semen analysis would be able to determine if your husband has any fertility issues."

