

WDDTY  
ALTERNATIVES

# Family matters

A change of diet and lifestyle helped Neringa Kasaciuniene go from 'infertile' to a healthy mum-of-two

# When

Neringa Kasaciuniene ran out of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in tears after changing her mind about undergoing IVF (in-vitro fertilization), she thought she had given up her only chance of having children.

"My husband and I had been trying unsuccessfully to start a family for over five years," said Neringa, who moved to London from Lithuania 12 years ago. "My GP told me IVF was the only option—even though there was no reason in principle why I couldn't conceive—but I cancelled it at the last minute. I just couldn't go through with it."

But just a few months later, Neringa, aged 34 at the time, was staring at a home pregnancy test in disbelief. "I ended up taking five pregnancy tests," she said. "They all said I was pregnant."

It wasn't by accident, though, said Neringa, now 41, who went on to give birth to a healthy baby girl named Goda. "It was all down to a change of diet and lifestyle," she said.

## A chance meeting

As well as infertility, Neringa had suffered from general poor health for years, with symptoms like thinning hair, weight fluctuations, mood swings and constant fatigue. It was while looking for a special shampoo for her extremely fine hair in a health shop that she was first encouraged to consider a nutritional approach.

"I started talking to a girl in the shop who was studying nutrition at the College of Naturopathic Medicine [CNM]," Neringa recalls. "I mentioned my health issues and she said that the same course might be helpful for me. I could learn about nutrition and help myself at the same time."

Neringa's interest was sparked and she immediately began researching CNM—a training provider in nutrition and other natural therapies, with several colleges across the UK and Ireland. She was so convinced it was right for her that she decided to quit her job and enrol at the London college straight away.

"I was a fashion stylist, but my job was really stressful and didn't make me happy," said Neringa. "I was looking for a change in my life. Everything seemed to fall into place."

## All change

Shortly after starting the course at CNM, Neringa discovered the college had its own clinic run by students, but supervised by qualified practitioners, and offering health consultations at reduced rates. She booked an appointment with a trainee nutritional therapist and herbalist there to discuss her health problems, including her difficulty conceiving, and was given an individualized naturopathic treatment plan to follow, based on her health history, diet and lifestyle, and on various physical clues such as the colour of her tongue and condition of her nails.

"I thought my diet was pretty healthy before, but I was told I wasn't eating enough protein or getting enough good fats," Neringa said. "I'd have protein like chicken breast maybe once or twice a week, and I'd avoid fat because I thought it would make me fat."

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Neringa's new diet involved eating protein at every meal, and included plenty of good fats rich in essential fatty acids like omega-3s. She also completely cut refined sugar from her diet, as well as white flour and starchy carbs, and reduced her dairy intake.

"I started eating lots of beans, lentils, chickpeas, quinoa, vegetables, nuts and seeds... fish a couple of times a week... avocados... superfoods like goji berries and cacao nibs... and I stopped having unhealthy treats like biscuits, chocolate and cakes."

Drinks-wise, Neringa was told to sip coconut oil mixed with hot water throughout the day to make extra sure she was getting enough healthy fats, and to include plenty of nutrient-rich green juices.

She was also advised to incorporate warming herbs and spices like cayenne pepper and ginger into her diet. "I'm someone who's always cold—even when it's hot outside," said Neringa. "The herbs and spices were meant to help with that."

And to boost her slightly underactive thyroid, Neringa was given a combination of supportive herbs in tincture form. "I don't know what they were exactly," said Neringa.

"The herbalist gave me a tailor-made formula based on what I'd told her and previous tests I'd had."

As for her lifestyle, Neringa didn't smoke or drink, but was told she could be healthier by exercising more and using stress-reduction techniques like deep-breathing, yoga and meditation.

"I used to exercise now and then, but not on a regular basis," said Neringa. "I started going for walks in the park every day. And I'd sit on a bench and do Ayurvedic breathing techniques."

### Good news

Neringa was offered no promises about any outcome; the holistic plan was designed to get her back to optimal health and boost her fertility at the same time. She was told to monitor any changes and check in with the therapists on a regular basis.

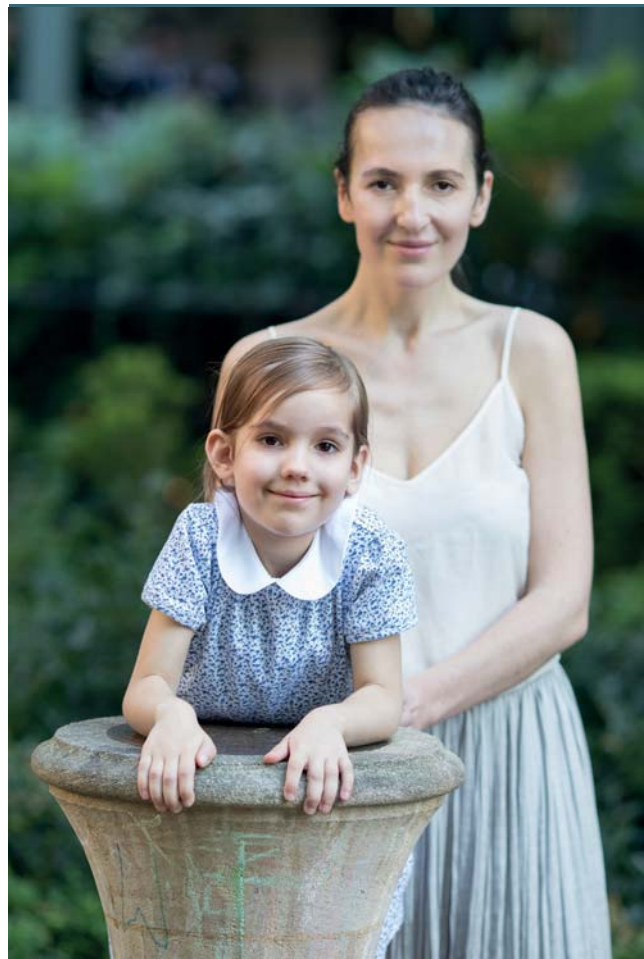
"One of the first things I noticed was that my mood improved," said Neringa. "I remember I used to feel happy one minute and be crying the next. After about a month on the plan, my mood stabilized and I felt a lot calmer."

Neringa also realized the condition of her hair was gradually improving. "I bumped into a girl I used to work with a few years ago and straight away she commented on my hair and how good it was looking," said Neringa. "Before it was really thin, and I had bald patches."

Other positive changes Neringa noticed was that she stopped feeling hungry all the time, which meant she stopped binge-eating unhealthy foods, and she no longer felt bloated after meals. "My weight stabilized for the first time in ages, I stopped craving sugar, and my digestive difficulties cleared up," she said.

Neringa's husband, Tadas, was so impressed with

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## What's on the menu?

Here's a snapshot of Neringa's diet before and after starting her new plan

NERINGA'S TYPICAL DAILY DIET	BEFORE	AFTER
Breakfast	Plain porridge with cow's milk	Gluten-free porridge with almond milk and added goji berries, cacao nibs and cinnamon
Lunch	Small portion of pasta with vegetables	Chicken and avocado salad with olive-oil dressing
Dinner	Meatballs and potatoes	Salmon with lentils and green vegetables
Snacks and treats	Biscuits, cakes, chocolate	Medjool dates, Bounce protein ball, handful of nuts, houmous
Drinks	Water	Green juice or smoothie, hot water with coconut oil



the difference in his wife that he started to follow the diet himself, and both of them stuck rigidly to the recommendations for six months.

Then the couple got the news they'd been hoping to hear for nearly six years: Neringa was pregnant. "I couldn't believe it," said Neringa. "It was amazing."

### Healthy and happy

Despite being warned by doctors that her uterus lining was thin and that it would not be easy for her to carry a baby to term, Neringa's pregnancy was trouble-free. "It was great," she said. "I had so much energy."

And once Goda was born, Neringa felt good enough to continue her studies at CNM. "I dashed back and forth from college to feed her," said Neringa. "It would have been all too easy to give up studying at that point, but I knew that the nutritional knowledge I was gaining made my efforts worthwhile."

And she was right. Neringa is now a qualified nutritional therapist, practising from her home office in Kensington, and a mum to not just one daughter, but two.

"Leva was born in March last year," said Neringa. "We didn't have any problems conceiving her!"

Neringa's life has completely changed and she feels incredibly lucky. "I love everything about practising and improving people's lives," said Neringa. "And we have two beautiful super-healthy daughters—both conceived naturally. It's fantastic!"

Joanna Evans

### Useful contacts and resources

College of Naturopathic Medicine  
[www.naturopathy-uk.com](http://www.naturopathy-uk.com); tel: 01342 410 505

Neringa Kasaciuniene  
 Kensington Nutrition, 2 Holland Place Chambers, W8 4LS  
[www.kensingtonnutrition.co.uk](http://www.kensingtonnutrition.co.uk); tel: 078 1706 3737

The National Institute of Medical Herbalists  
[www.nimh.org.uk](http://www.nimh.org.uk); tel: 01392 426 022

## Natural ways to boost fertility

There's plenty of evidence to show that nutrition and lifestyle can have an impact on fertility. Here are some simple steps to boost fertility, based on scientific studies.



**Cut the caffeine.** In one study, women who consumed a cup of coffee or more a day were half as likely to become pregnant, per menstrual cycle, as women who drank less than that.<sup>1</sup>

**Stop smoking.** Cigarette-smokers are much more likely to experience infertility compared with non-smoking women,<sup>2</sup> and smoking can have a negative impact on male fertility too.<sup>3</sup>

**Avoid alcohol.** Even moderate drinking (five or fewer drinks per week) has been linked to infertility in women.<sup>4</sup>

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Being either excessively overweight or underweight can contribute to infertility in women.<sup>5</sup>

**Boost your intake of healthy fats,** vegetable protein, fibre and iron. Harvard researchers found that an optimal diet for fertility was one with:

- a lower intake of trans fats (found in cakes, biscuits and margarine) with a greater intake of monounsaturated fats (found in olive oil, avocados and nuts)
- a lower intake of animal protein with a greater intake of vegetable protein (such as peas, lentils and beans)
- a greater intake of high-fibre, low-glycaemic carbohydrates (such as beans, vegetables, nuts and seeds)
- a greater intake of plant-based iron (from sources like whole grains, leafy green vegetables, nuts and seeds)
- a preference for high-fat dairy products (like full-fat cheese and milk).<sup>6</sup>

**Supplement** to correct any nutritional deficiencies. A study by Dr Stephen Davies of the Biolab Medical Unit in London showed that magnesium deficiency is associated with female infertility, increased miscarriage rates, and increased incidences of premature and low-birth-weight babies. When magnesium supplements were given for four months to six magnesium-deficient women with unexplained infertility, all six conceived within the following eight months and produced healthy babies.<sup>7</sup> In men, low levels of zinc have been linked to poor sperm quality and infertility.<sup>8</sup>

**Take a multivitamin.** Women who take a daily multivitamin took 5 per cent less time to conceive than those taking a placebo.<sup>9</sup>

**Manage stress.** As infertile couples tend to be more stressed than fertile couples,<sup>10</sup> relaxation techniques like meditation and yoga may help.<sup>11</sup>

#### REFERENCES

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