

# HEARTBEAT



Study: Senior athletes happier, healthier

GENERATIONS, D6

## EXPECTING THE BEST

### Healthy lifestyle essential for healthy baby

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**T**ina and John Mulholland say they thank God every day for the gift of a beautiful daughter.

"She brings us so much joy," said Tina Mulholland of Loveland.

Little 6-year-old Kathryn is all the more precious to her parents because they thought they wouldn't be able to have a child at all.

With the purchase of a home, the Mulhollands decided it was time to start a family. But after a year went by with no baby, she sought medical advice. That's when she found out she was infertile.

"I had a true medical problem that caused my infertility," she said.

A past undiagnosed appendicitis infection caused her body to wrap her fallopian tubes around the organ to close off the infection. Once discovered, her appendix was removed. Otherwise healthy, her tubes were irreparably damaged. To conceive, she would need in vitro fertilization.

Treatment costs were staggering to the couple. According to the University of Cincinnati Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology's Center for Reproductive Health Web site, treatment packages start at \$6,300. That figure does not include medications, which can run an additional \$2,000 to \$2,500.

Disappointed, the Mulhollands looked to adopting a baby, but found those costs daunting as well.

It was her faith in God that helped her through that trying time, she said.

"I said 'God please take away this pain of not being able to have a child.'"





Within two days of the distraught woman's

prayer, her mother called to tell her of a newspaper article about the Gordon Gift of Life Foundation. The foundation, which was established to help couples with infertility problems, helps to defray costs associated with in vitro fertilization.

"I'm a firm believer in the power of prayer," Tina Mulholland said. "I wasn't ready to hear God saying 'no.' But when I heard about the Gift of Life Foundation, I had pretty much given up," she said.

She wrote to the foundation and signed the letter, "A childless mother." Soon, she heard word that she and her husband were the first couple selected for the program.

"We were the first couple selected ... and the first couple to conceive through the Gift of Life," said Tina Mulholland.

Now their miracle baby Kathryn is the pride and joy of her parents and grandparents, she said.

## A healthy lifestyle

For women who are planning to get pregnant, the very first step is to schedule an appointment with an obstetrician/gynecologist, said Debby Baker, a registered nurse and lactation consultant in the obstetrics department of McCullough-Hyde Memorial Hospital in Oxford.

A doctor would be able to rule out any

tential problems, and can tell the woman whether any medications she is taking would be safe during

pregnancy. Some medications, she said, may cause birth defects or other complications. Also key is a healthy lifestyle, Baker said.

"You want the woman to maintain a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet," she said.

A healthy lifestyle encompasses a well-balanced diet that spans all food groups, as well as an exercise regimen, she said.

Adding a multivitamin containing folic acid is essential to good health before becoming pregnant, as is exercise, which can help reduce stress, tone muscles and can help reduce fatigue that accompanies pregnancy, she said. Drinking plenty of water is also important to good health.

"If she's smoking, she needs to stop or decrease and start the process of stopping. She really needs to be stopped smoking before she comes pregnant," Baker said.

Other things to avoid include alcohol, drugs and caffeine, which is present in coffee, tea, soda pop and chocolate.

A woman who is planning to become pregnant should not be on a diet, Baker said, because she needs to make sure she is eating a balanced diet and not a diet that is restricted in essential nutrients.

To help achieve a successful conception, women should keep in mind that ovulation occurs approximately 14 days before the start of menstruation, said Dr. Daniel B. Williams, associate professor and director of UC's Center for Reproductive Health.

"From day 12 to day 17, having relations every other day is appropriate," he said.

The West Chester Township doctor was named a "Best Doctor in America" two years in a row by Woodward/White Inc. He works out of the center's main office at The Christ Hospital in Cincinnati and a satellite office in West Chester Township. The center has a second satellite office in Florence, Ky.

To more precisely determine the optimal times for conception, Williams said there are over-the-counter ovulation prediction kits on the market.

## When to seek help

At what point a woman who is having trouble conceiving should seek the help of a specialist varies depending on the woman's age and other health factors, he said.

"The definition of infertility is inability to conceive after one year of trying," he said. "It's important to keep in mind that as patients age it can take longer to conceive. Many people use six months as a cutoff for patients who are over 35."

Women should seek a specialist sooner if she has an irregular menstrual cycle or has a history of problems, including past surgery or tubal infections, he said. The same goes for her partner, he said, if he has a past history of surgery, infection or injury.

In fact, according to the center's Web site, males account for 40 percent of infertility problems. It is as important for men to be evaluated as it is for women in such cases, Williams said.

Women over 40, he said, have a tougher time getting pregnant and should consult with a specialist from the beginning.

Through several treatment options, including IVF and possible use of donor egg or sperm, the center can help couples conceive who wouldn't be able to otherwise.

"It's rewarding to help people creating families," Williams said.

The center's specialists work closely with the woman's OB/GYN throughout the process, he said.

"We do a blood pregnancy test, then we do an ultrasound at seven to eight weeks," he said.

Once a viable pregnancy is confirmed, the woman is cared for by her OB/GYN for the rest of her pregnancy.

Whether by Mother Nature or a specialist's help, the end result of a healthy pregnancy is ideally a healthy baby.

For more information on fertility treatments, visit [www.ucfertility.com](http://www.ucfertility.com).