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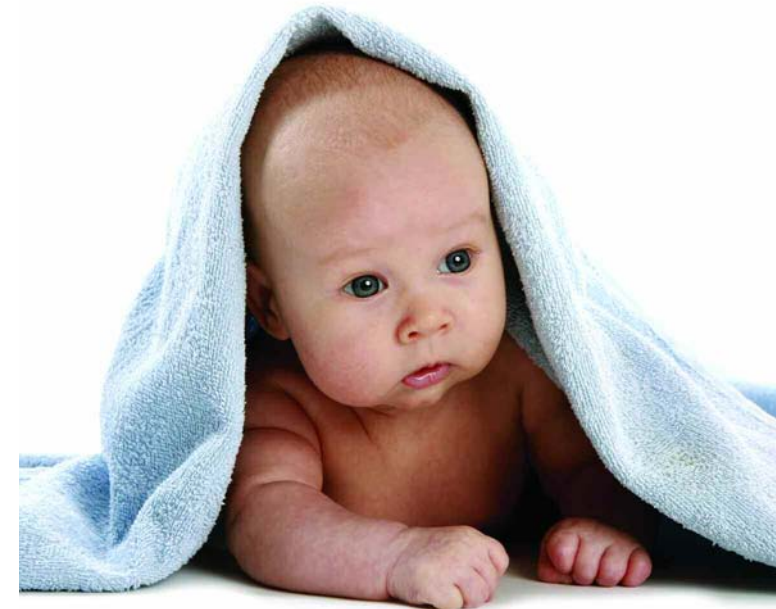
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Fertility and Infertility



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Fertility and Infertility

About one in seven couples living in the western world have problems conceiving. It has been estimated that around 80 million of couples worldwide have some fertility problems.

What is fertility?

Fertility is the ability to conceive. The crucial step of this process is known as fertilisation – an egg bursts from the follicle and is released from the ovary. The egg then travels along the Fallopian tube where, at some point, it fuses with the sperm to form a single cell. The fertilised egg takes three days to travel to the uterus (womb), and during this time the cells continue dividing. The fertilised egg, now known as embryo, implants itself in the endometrium (lining of the womb).

How long should it take?

Couples who have regular unprotected sexual intercourse (2 to 3 times a week) should conceive within two years. The chance of getting pregnant in any one month is 20%, but this declines with increasing female age.

In every 100 couples:

- 20 will conceive within one month
- 70 will conceive within six months
- 85 will conceive within a year
- 90 will conceive within eighteen months
- 95 will conceive within two years

Five important things you can do to protect your fertility

- 1 Eat a healthy, nutritious and varied diet
- 2 Have an adequate body weight
- 3 Avoid excessive alcohol (14 units/week for women - 21 units/week for men)
- 4 Quit smoking cigarettes and marijuana
- 5 Prevent sexually transmitted infections

What is infertility?

Infertility means being unable to conceive. Few couples are infertile, while most are subfertile, which means they have problems that make conception difficult and medical help is needed.

There are two types of couple infertility:

Primary infertility – couples who are unable to conceive and have never achieved a pregnancy.

Secondary infertility – couples who after having had one or more pregnancies are unable to conceive.

What's the cause of infertility?

Female problems

- The ovaries are not releasing eggs (anovulation) or the eggs are immature
- Hormone imbalances and deficiencies
- Genetic abnormalities
- The fallopian tubes are damaged or blocked or absent (for example after surgery for an ectopic pregnancy)
- The lining of the womb does not develop properly
- The lubricating mucus from the cervix (neck of the womb) is hostile
- Endometriosis
- Previous infections (particularly sexually transmitted infections)
- Previous surgery for ovarian cyst(s)

Male problems

- Hormone problems
- Genetic abnormalities
- Sex-related problems (difficulty getting an erection or ejaculating)
- Retrograde ejaculation (sperm travels backwards to the bladder)
- The tubes that carry the sperm are damaged or blocked or absent
- Previous inflammation of the testes (orchitis caused by virus or bacteria)
- Previous surgery to correct undescended or twisted testicles
- Varicocele (varicose veins on the testicles)
- Drug treatment or previous radiotherapy for cancer

Who and when to investigate?

- Couples who have not conceived after 1 year of regular unprotected sexual intercourse
- Couples who have a known cause of infertility, have predisposing factors, or where a woman is aged 35 years or over

