

Infertility Risk Factors

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter

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There is no worse fear than infertility for a couple trying to conceive. Unfortunately, infertility is a problem for 1 in 8 couples.¹ It's important to be aware of the risk factors associated with infertility prior to beginning your family planning. If you suspect a problem, do not get discouraged! Nearly 90% of couples with fertility problems can conceive. As many as 50% of struggling couples will conceive within the first year, but the other 50% may need medical intervention.²

Infertility Risk Factors:

- **Age:** After age 32, the quality and quantity of women's eggs begin to decline.² By age 40, a woman's chance of pregnancy has decreased from 90% to 67%. The chance further declines to 15% by age 45.¹
- **Tobacco Smoking:** Smoking is bad for your ENTIRE body. It damages your cervix and fallopian tubes and leads to an increased risk of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy. Smoking may also "age" ovaries and deplete eggs prematurely.²
- **Weight:** Being more than 25% over or under weight may inhibit normal ovulation.³ Being overweight can overload the body's estrogen, disrupting the reproductive cycle. Having a healthy body mass index (BMI) has been shown to increase the frequency of ovulation.¹
- **Sexual History:** Having unprotected sexual intercourse with multiple partners can increase your risk of contracting a sexual transmitted infection that may lead to damaged fallopian tubes and fertility complications.²
- **Alcohol:** Heavy alcohol consumption is associated with endometriosis and ovulation disorders. Even a few drinks per week can alter conception.²
- **Caffeine:** Consuming more than the equivalent of 6 cups of coffee per day (900mg of caffeine) can alter a woman's fertility. ²
- **Too Much Exercise:** Some studies have shown that women who exercise more than 7 hours per week are at risk for ovulation problems.²

Risk Factors Linked to Fertility Problems

Some factors are known to be associated with fertility complications. It is advisable that you talk with your physician before conceiving if you have one of the following risk factors.

A history of³:

- Endometriosis
- Uterine fibroids
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Blocked fallopian tubes from an infection or previous surgery
- Painful or irregular periods
- Excessive facial and body hair
- Pelvic or abdominal surgery
- DES exposure in utero (DES is a drug given to pregnant women to prevent miscarriages between 1941 to 1971)
- Chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, or thyroid disease

Men are at risk too!

Infertility is due to a male factor in approximately 30% of cases and from both partners in 30% of other cases.¹ Just because your partner has one of the following risk factors does not mean you will be unable to conceive.

A history of³:

- Infection with the mumps virus after puberty
- Chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, or thyroid disease
- Undescended testicles
- Testicular tumors, cysts, cancer or varicoceles
- Taking some steroids or antihypertensives
- Smoking tobacco or marijuana
- Using a hot tub or sauna regularly
- Frequent long-distance bicycle rides
- Exposure to toxins or hazards such as lead, cadmium, mercury, ethylene oxide, vinyl chloride, radioactivity, and x-rays

If you are having difficulty becoming pregnant, talk with your primary care physician or gynecologist, and feel free to express any concerns you have. Your doctor will answer your questions and refer you to a fertility specialist for a complete work-up if necessary.

References

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3. Baby Center LLC. *Fertility Risk Factors*. 2011. http://www.babycenter.com/o_fertility-risk-factors_3535.bc. Accessed September 29, 2011.