

Infertility



What is infertility?

Infertility means you have trouble getting pregnant. You have infertility if you can't get pregnant after 1 year of trying or after 6 months of trying if you are aged 35 years and older. Trying to get pregnant means you are having regular sex and not using birth control. Infertility is common. About 1 in every 10 women has infertility.

How does pregnancy happen in my body?

Pregnancy happens after many steps. Your body releases an ovum (egg) from 1 of your ovaries. This is called ovulation. The ovum travels through your fallopian tubes (small tubes) toward your uterus (womb). During this time if you have sex, and the man ejaculates in your vagina, sperm travel through your vagina and cervix (opening to the womb) to the uterus where they join with the ovum. This joining of the sperm and ovum is called fertilization. Then the fertilized ovum attaches to the lining of your uterus and starts to grow and develop into a baby. Pregnancy requires good timing. You must have sex around the time of ovulation. Infertility can happen if there is a problem with any of these steps.

What are the common reasons for infertility?

Both men and women can have problems that cause infertility. About one-third of the time, infertility is because of problems with the woman. Another one-third of the time, infertility is from a problem with the man. The rest of the time infertility is caused by problems with both the man and woman or for unknown reasons.

The most common reason for infertility in women is a problem with ovulation. If you do not release an ovum regularly, there is no ovum to be fertilized when the sperm enter the uterus. You may not be ovulating if you do not have periods or only have a period every few months. Problems with ovulation are often caused by hormonal problems like polycystic ovary syndrome or weighing too much or not enough.

Infertility also can occur if your uterine lining does not get thick enough to support a pregnancy. This can happen if the time between when you ovulate and when you have your period is too short, 10 days or fewer, called a short luteal phase. You can check whether you are ovulating or have a short luteal phase by charting your basal body temperature each morning. To find out how to do this, see the Web sites listed on the next page.

Infertility also can be caused by blocked fallopian tubes. Having some sexually transmitted infections, endometriosis (tissue that lines your uterus grows outside your uterus), or scar tissue from surgery can cause this. Physical problems with your uterus or uterine fibroids (clumps of tissue that form in the muscle of your uterus) also can cause infertility.

Infertility problems in men usually happen when there are problems with sperm being made. They may not make enough sperm or any sperm at all, or the sperm may not move well. This can happen if the sperm are not shaped correctly or something blocks the sperm from being released. Men also may have a problem called varicocele. This happens if the veins in the testicles are too large and produce too much heat. The heat can cause changes in the number and shape of the sperm.

What can my partner and I do to help us get pregnant on our own?

- Make sure you have sex around the time you are ovulating. This increases your chances of getting pregnant. You can know you are ovulating by checking your vaginal discharge daily. Stretchy discharge that feels like egg whites usually means you are about to ovulate. You also can take your basal body temperature every morning with a special thermometer or use an ovulation predictor kit that you can buy at the drugstore.
- Your fertility decreases as you get older. It is easier to get pregnant if you start trying when you are younger, especially before you are 35 years old.

- Maintaining a healthy weight can help your fertility. If you weigh too much or too little, your body may not ovulate every month. Sometimes even just a few pounds can make a difference. Eat a healthy, balanced diet full of high-fiber foods like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. This can help you control your weight and increase your ability to get pregnant.
- You and your partner should quit smoking and drinking lots of alcohol. Both habits can affect ovulation in women and sperm counts in men.
- You and your partner should avoid toxic substances like fish with high doses of mercury and pesticides. These can affect fertility in both men and women.
- Decreasing your stress levels can help you get pregnant. Anything that helps you relax, like listening to music, doing yoga, journaling, reading, or taking a hot bath can help lower your stress levels.

When do I need to see a health care provider?

Remember, sometimes it just takes time and patience to get pregnant. So if you don't meet the criteria listed in the chart, keep trying. If it is time to get help, don't hesitate. Remember, you are not alone. Millions of couples struggle with infertility, but most are helped with medications and other treatments.

If you...	Time period of trying to get pregnant before you should have an infertility evaluation
Are 35 years old or younger	1 year
Are aged 35 years and older	6 months
Have irregular (farther apart than 35 days) or no periods (this is a common sign that your body is not releasing an ovum each month)	As soon as possible
Have a known fertility problem (you or your partner)	As soon as possible

For More Information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Find frequently asked questions on infertility: what it is, what causes it, and what you can do about it.
<http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Infertility/#1>

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine

Find fact sheets and videos about infertility plus a list of health care providers in your area and many other resources.

http://www.asrm.org/patient_resources/

Basal Body Temperature Chart Information

Find information on how to chart your basal body temperature in order to know when and if you are ovulating. There is also a blank chart for you to print and use.

<http://www.upmc.com/HealthAtoZ/patienteducation/W/Pages/basalbodytemperature%28bbt%29chart.aspx>

Basal Body Temperature Chart

This is a PDF chart you can print and use.

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/mom-to-be-tools/basal-temperature-chart.pdf>

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