



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

The inability to become pregnant after 1 year of sexual activity without contraception. Infertility occurs in 10 to 15% of all couples. Female fertility depends on normal functioning of the reproductive tract and the production of hormones necessary for normal sexual development and functioning. About 30% of all infertility is attributed to the female, 30% to the male, and the rest is a combination or unknown.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Inability to conceive.

CAUSES

- Ovulatory dysfunction (unable to ovulate [release eggs]).
- Anatomic abnormalities of the reproductive system.
- Emotional stress.
- Repeated weight-gain/weight-loss cycles.
- Hormone dysfunction (such as thyroid and prolactin disorders).
- Vaginitis.
- Disorders of the cervix, such as infection, laceration or tearing from previous childbirth or narrowing of the cervical opening for any reason.
- Amenorrhea (no menstrual periods) caused by strenuous exercise programs or eating disorders (bulimia or anorexia nervosa).
- Chemical changes in the cervical mucus.
- Ovarian cysts.
- Endometriosis.
- Smoking.
- Tumors.
- The use of some medications, including oral contraceptives (e.g., Depo-Provera). A large number of women cannot conceive for many months after discontinuing use.
- Intrauterine device (IUD) may be a possible cause.
- Disorders probably not related to infertility include: a tilted uterus; small fibroid tumors of the uterus; or inability to achieve sexual orgasm.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Marital discord and infrequent sexual intercourse.
- Smoking.
- On average, female fertility begins its meaningful slide at age 27.
- Drugs of abuse, such as heroin.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Obtain treatment for any treatable disorder that causes infertility.
- Avoid preventable causes of infertility.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

- Some fertility problems are minor and reversible. Approach treatment with optimism.
- Research into this area is offering new options to couples.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Psychological distress, including feelings of guilt, inadequacy and loss of self-esteem.
- Treatment costs are high and often not covered by insurance.
- The possible long-term effects of medications used to increase fertility are unknown.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Preliminary diagnostic tests may include a health history, laboratory blood tests and a pelvic examination. Further testing may then be recommended. Multiple tests are available to study specific aspects of reproduction and you may be referred to a fertility specialist. The causes of infertility can be complex.
- After testing, a treatment plan will be determined based on the findings.
- Take a supplemental vitamin containing 1 mg folic acid to reduce the possibility of open neural tube defect (spine formation problems) during fetal development.
- Some general suggestions that may help you conceive:
 - Live a healthy lifestyle; reducing stress, eating a well-balanced diet, exercising moderately, and learn what to avoid or moderate.
 - Give up alcohol, recreational drugs and cigarettes.
 - Get psychotherapy or counseling, if marital problems exist.
 - Get help for depression.
 - Keep a basal body-temperature chart to become familiar with your ovulation pattern. Have intercourse just before ovulation, which can be determined from the chart.
 - Talk to your obstetric provider about any herbal products, supplements, or other "natural" products you take.
 - Don't use a lubricant during sexual relations. Lubricants may interfere with sperm mobility.
 - Your partner should withdraw his penis quickly from your vagina after ejaculation. If left in, it reduces the number of sperm that can swim toward the egg.
 - After your partner's ejaculation, place pillows under your buttocks to provide an easier downhill swim for the sperm.
 - Maintain a positive attitude. Worry and tension may contribute to infertility.
- Additional information available from:
 - American Infertility Assn: www.americaninfertility.org.
 - National Infertility Assn: www.resolve.org.
 - American Society for Reproductive Medicine: www.asrm.com.

MEDICATION

- Hormones for a hormone imbalance.
- Gonad stimulants such as clomiphene, menotropins (Pergonal), human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG), leuprolide (Lupron) or urofollitropin may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Exercise moderately. Overexercising may contribute to infertility. Stopping all exercise for three months to make sure exercise isn't a factor is an option to consider.

DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet. If you are overweight, try to achieve your ideal weight.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member is concerned about infertility.
- Conception does not occur within 6 months, despite recommendations and treatment.
- The drugs used in treatment cause unexpected side effects.