

FACTSHEET

CONCEPTION TIPS

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Lifestyle Tips

It's important you prepare your body and adjust your lifestyle to maximise your chances of conception. Here are some tips that can really make a difference to your level of fertility.

- **Water**
When trying to conceive it is very important to drink lots of water (about 8-10 cups a day). This helps the kidneys to flush out waste products from the body and increases fertile quality cervical fluid.
- **Avoid alcohol**
It is a good idea to avoid or strictly limit alcohol intake as this reduces fertility. Department of Health advice is to avoid alcohol completely if trying to conceive or during pregnancy.
- **Caffeine**
Caffeine is thought to restrict the growth of a developing baby by constricting blood vessels and reducing blood flow to the uterus. Current advice is to limit caffeine intake to below 300mg per day, equivalent to 4 cups of instant coffee, 3 cups of fresh coffee or 6 cups of tea.
- **Smoking**
Women have a 40% lower chance of getting pregnant if they smoke, according to a report published by the British Medical Association (BMA). Smoking decreases sperm count and increases sperm abnormalities in men. Ask your GP or Practice Nurse for help in quitting.
- **Exercise**
Women who exercise regularly are less likely to experience the uncomfortable side effects of pregnancy (back pain, piles, swollen ankles, etc), to have excessive weight gain and more likely to feel good about their changing body. A fit, healthy body is also more likely to cope better with child birth. Find a balance though because excessive amounts of exercise can lead to fertility problems such as irregular periods and anovulatory cycles (cycles where ovulation does not occur).
- **Stress less**
There are so many people who worry excessively about becoming pregnant and once they release that stress, their body reacts to the new peace by creating a new life. So try not to worry and enjoy the fun of trying to conceive.

- **Supplement**
Taking a supplement specially formulated for before conception will provide you with 400mcg folic acid and other nutrients such as l-arginine vitamin D and vitamin B12 which help support the nutritional requirements of women trying to conceive.
- **Sex**
Have sex often, at least 3 times a week, the more often you try, the more chances you get at becoming pregnant.
- **Lay low**
Lying down for at least a few minutes after sex increases the odds that the sperm will be able to keep their date with the awaiting egg.
- **STDs**
Make sure that you have been properly screened for STDs. Pelvic inflammatory disease is common amongst women with the number-one cause being an untreated sexually transmitted disease.
- **Medications**
If you are taking any prescription or over-the-counter drugs be sure to ask your doctor if it's safe to continue taking them once you start trying to conceive. Contrary to popular belief, taking the contraceptive pill, antibiotics or analgesics should not affect the accuracy of your pregnancy test.
- **Pill**
If you have been on the pill for a long time you may be low on certain vitamins and minerals especially the B-group vitamins.
- **Calendar**
Keep a menstrual calendar and note the date when your period starts, the number of days it lasts and anything else your doctor or midwife might want to know.
- **Numbers game**
Keep in mind that baby making is a numbers game. Even if you do everything 'right' you still only have a 25-30 percent chance of conceiving in any given cycle.
- **Diets**
Don't go on a crash diet. They affect your ovulation and consequently your fertility.

Dietary Advice

Eating a healthy balanced diet when trying to conceive helps the body to be in optimum condition for conception and pregnancy , and also helps to build adequate stores of vitamins and minerals for the baby to call upon when needed.

Foods to consume while trying to get pregnant:

Leafy greens such as broccoli, fortified breakfast cereals, citrus fruits and pulses provide folic acid which is important for the baby's neural tube development.

Fortified breakfast cereals, lentils, soy beans, dried fruit and leafy greens such as spinach are great sources of iron.

New research (Dr Jorge Chavarros, Harvard School of Public Health) indicates women who want to get pregnant should eat a Mediterranean-style diet rich in avocados and olive oil but light in dairy and meat.

Eating mono-unsaturated fat - found in peanuts, almonds and cashews may support conception too.

Fish, wholegrain breads, asparagus, spinach and watercress will provide zinc to help keep the immune system strong, which is essential when trying to get pregnant. Zinc can also help the production of healthy eggs, as well as healthy sperm.

Fibre rich beans and whole grains keep the bowels healthy, helping to flush away the bodies waste, thereby increasing the chances of getting pregnant.

It is also a good idea to consider taking a supplement designed to support conception which contains 400mcg folic acid and other nutrients to help support the nutritional requirements of women trying to conceive.

Myths Unravelling

Planning for a baby is one of the most important times in a couple's lives, but for many it can be confusing and complicated. Here we dispel some of the common fertility myths below.

- **Myth: Having sex every day will increase our chances of conceiving**
Couples trying to conceive are encouraged to have intercourse regularly to increase their chances of conception, but having intercourse every day is likely to leave you exhausted, particularly as it takes many couples 6-12 months to conceive. However, as sperm can survive up to 5 days after release, and predicting ovulation is an in-exact science, most GPs advise having intercourse every 2-3 days to maximize the chances that sperm are around to fertilize an egg once ovulation occurs.
- **Myth: You can't get pregnant when you are menstruating**
While women cannot conceive during menstruation as the hormones resulting in menstruation are the opposite of those required for a pregnancy to occur, she can conceive from sex during menstruation as she may ovulate early and sperm can survive for up to 5 days after release. Research in the USA¹ has found that women may be fertile as early as day 4 of their cycle (day one is taken as the first day of bleeding) therefore pregnancy could occur at any point in a cycle.
- **Myth: You can only conceive from sex on the day that you ovulate**
Not true. The human egg is viable for fertilization for around one day after it is released from the ovaries. However given that sperm can survive for up to 5 days after intercourse and women may produce more than 1 egg in a 24 hour period, technically a woman can conceive from intercourse occurring from anything up to 5 days prior to or even up to 2 days after ovulation, i.e. for one week of each menstrual cycle.
- **Myth: A normal menstrual cycle is 28 days**
Not true, this is a myth perpetuated by the pill which makes all menstrual cycles regular and 28 days in length. In fact menstrual cycles can vary from anything between 24-36 days, and not only vary between women but can vary considerably in any individual woman from month to month.
- **Myth: Lying down with legs raised after sex will increase chances of getting pregnant**
While there is no scientific evidence to support this approach, some people claim it helps and as it is totally harmless it has to be worth a shot.

- **Myth: Eating oysters will boost my fertility**
There is a grain of truth in this because oysters are a rich source of zinc, low levels of which can be a factor in hampering fertility. Take stock of your diet and ensure that you are eating plenty of fruit and vegetables, wholegrain cereals, which are rich in antioxidants, include oily types of fish twice each week (e.g. salmon, herring, sardine, etc) to boost essential fatty acid and cut down on caffeine and alcohol both of which can hinder conception if taken in excess. Don't forget to keep active and if you are a smoker, quit.
- **Myth: You can get everything you need from diet and don't need to take supplements**
This is definitely not true, and in fact all women are advised to take a supplement containing 400mcg of folic acid daily while trying to conceive and for the first 3 months of pregnancy. Taking a folic acid supplement is important for neural tube development in the baby. As most of us don't manage to eat a perfect diet all the time, taking a supplement specifically designed for conception or pregnancy can help to ensure that there are plenty of all the vitamins and minerals important for conception.

1.Fehring RJ, Schneider M, Raviele K (2006) Variability in phases of the menstrual cycle. J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs 35: 376-384

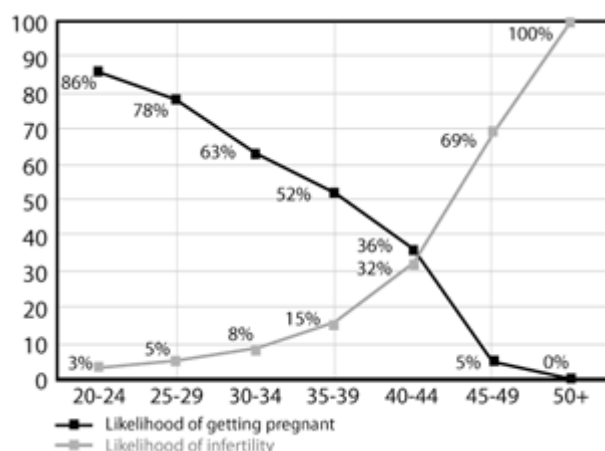
Fertility Facts

Age & fertility

According to research, women are leaving it later to start a family. The Office of National Statistics has reported that, since the 1980s the rates for women giving birth at age 30 or over have gone up, while the rates for women giving birth aged under 30 have fallen.

Fertility falls more sharply for women as they age than for men. As you can see from the chart below, women are most fertile between the ages of 20 and 24 years - as women grow older the likelihood of getting pregnant falls while the likelihood of infertility rises sharply. Men can remain fertile for much longer but male fertility still declines with age, although less dramatically.

Chart: Pregnancy rates over the course of one year
Both of the line graphs are for women with normal reproductive function



Source: Management of the Infertile Woman by Helen A. Carcio and The Fertility Sourcebook by M. Sara Rosenthal

Fertility factors

As women get older, there are a number of factors that can make it more difficult to conceive. Fertility factors that change include:

Ovarian reserve - this is the number of functioning follicles left in the ovaries. As women get older they have fewer viable eggs left; in cases of early menopause, the eggs run out much sooner than usual.

Menstrual cycle - as women approach the menopause their menstrual cycles can become irregular and shorter.

Lining of the womb - the endometrium may become thinner and less hospitable to a fertilised egg.

Mucus secretions - vaginal secretions can become less fluid and more hostile to sperm.

Diseases affecting the reproductive system - some conditions can damage the reproductive organs as time passes, or worsen if not treated properly, including endometriosis, PCOS and Chlamydia.

Chronic illnesses - some illnesses can have a negative impact on fertility.

Tips for him

Men can do a great deal to improve their chances of conception by paying attention to health and lifestyle. Below is a check list for men who are trying for a baby.

- **Avoid alcohol**
It lowers men's sperm count even when men are only drinking small amounts.
- **Sex**
Have it in the morning as research shows that a man's sperm count is higher at this time so take advantage of it!
- **Keep cool**
Men have a higher sperm count when their genitals are kept at a cooler temperature. So stay away from hot tubs, hot showers and tight fitting underwear.
- **Smoking**
Cut it out. Smoking has been shown to reduce both the sperm count and the sperm motility.
- **Diet and supplements**
If men are malnourished or not getting enough of the right foods and nutrients their sperm count can suffer. Take a supplement which contains specific nutrients such as zinc for male reproductive health.
- **Workaholic**
Fatigue can have an effect on a man's interest in sex so it is important to try and find a balance.
- **Toxins**
Stay clear of environmental poisons and hazards. These include pesticides/insecticides, organic solvents, lead, ionizing radiation, heavy metals, and toxic chemicals.

- **Drugs**
Even in moderate amounts, for example cannabis, can cause a low sperm count, poor sperm speed and increased sperm abnormalities.
- **Exercise**
Swap the exercise bike for the treadmill. The repeated banging of the groin against the bicycle seat can damage critical arteries and nerves.
- **Mobile phones**
According to research by scientists in Hungary, men who keep mobile phones switched-on in their trouser pocket or on belts have significantly lowered sperm counts and risk their fertility being cut by up to a third. Also, the sperm's motility may be affected by long calls.

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