



Fertility

Understanding fertility

- More than 8 in 10 couples, where the woman is under 40, will conceive naturally within a year if they have regular unprotected sex.
- Of those who don't conceive in the first year, about half will conceive in the second year.
- Regular unprotected sex means having sex every 2 to 3 days without using contraception.

Causes for infertility or reduced fertility

- Age
 - Women are born with all their eggs, which age over time, leading to declining fertility after 30 and a sharp drop after 40, with natural conception rare past 45.
 - Men produce sperm daily, but fertility may decline after their mid-40s due to reduced sperm quality and quantity.
- Ovulation problems
- Endometriosis
- Poor egg quality
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
- Fallopian tube problems
- Poor sperm quality
- Premature menopause (premature ovarian insufficiency).
- Unexplained infertility - for 1 in 4 couples, the cause of infertility cannot be identified.

When to Seek Medical Help

- See your doctor if you haven't conceived after a year of trying.
- You should see your doctor sooner if:
 - you are over 36 (fertility decreases with age)
 - you have a known fertility issue, such as endometriosis or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
 - your partner has a known fertility issue, such as low sperm count
 - you are concerned you or your partner may have a medical issue that may be affecting your ability to get pregnant, such as a history of STIs, cancer treatment
 - you have irregular or no periods.

Both partners should visit the doctor together, as fertility problems can affect either or both individuals. Early testing and intervention can be critical.



Rose Clinic Bray

What to expect at the initial appointment with the doctor?

The doctor will ask you about your lifestyle, general health and medical history. They may ask you questions about:

- any previous pregnancies or children either of you may have
- how long you have been trying to conceive
- how often you have sex
- how long it has been since you stopped using contraception
- if you take any medication
- your lifestyle and habits.

They may also advise you about the things you can do to improve your chances of getting pregnant and how your partner can improve their fertility.

Depending on the above and both partners' medical histories the doctor may carry out a physical examination recommend some initial tests.

Tests for Women

- Blood tests:
 - Measure hormones that affect ovulation.
 - AMH (anti-Müllerian hormone) - AMH is a hormone produced by the follicles in your ovaries. This can give you an idea of how many eggs are present in your ovaries. The AMH test does not check the quality of your eggs or predict how many eggs you have left or detect other fertility problems. Do not delay trying to get pregnant based on a good AMH reading.
- Cervical screening:
 - This can be a good opportunity to check you are up to date with cervical screening.
- Ultrasound scan:
 - Checks ovaries, womb, and fallopian tubes for conditions like fibroids, endometriosis, or blockages.

Tests for Men

- Semen analysis:
 - Evaluates sperm count, movement, and shape.

Tests for both partners

- STI test: STIs such as chlamydia can affect fertility.



Improving your chances of conceiving

Have regular unprotected sex

- Aim for every 2-3 days to maximise chances.
- A woman is more likely to get pregnant if she has sex around the time of ovulation.
- Ovulation usually occurs 12-16 days before your next period. Sperm can survive for up to 7 days, so frequent sex covers the fertile window.
- If you have regular periods, you may be able to predict when ovulation is.
- In addition to counting cycle days, there are other methods to predict ovulation, such as tracking body temperature, monitoring cervical mucus changes, smartphone apps or using ovulation prediction kits, which can be especially helpful for women with irregular cycles.

Adopt a healthy lifestyle

- Maintain a healthy weight: Aim for a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9. Losing 5-10% of excess weight can improve fertility.
- Stop smoking: Smoking reduces fertility in both partners. Avoid second-hand smoke around your partner to support their health and fertility.
- Limit alcohol: Avoid alcohol entirely or stick to no more than 14 units per week, spread over three days. Excess alcohol affects fertility in both men and women.
- Stay active: Regular moderate exercise has been shown to help with fertility.
- Eat a balanced diet: Include at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily,. Foods like walnuts have been shown to boost sperm motility.
- High caffeine intake may increase the risk of miscarriage or pregnancy complications. Limit caffeine to less than 200 mg per day (about two cups of coffee).

Manage stress:

- Stress can lower yours or your partner's sex drive. This may reduce how often you have sex.
- Severe and ongoing stress can also affect fertility.
- Trying to get pregnant can be stressful. Try to take time to relax.
- Shared support: Trying to conceive can be emotionally challenging. Open communication and mutual encouragement are vital.



Rose Clinic Bray

Take folic acid

- Women should take 400 mcg daily for three months before conception and during the first trimester to reduce the risk of neural tube defects.

Keep testicles cool

- The testicles are outside the body because they need to be kept slightly cooler than the rest of you to produce high quality sperm.
- Avoid saunas, hot baths, and long periods sitting with a laptop on your lap.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing and underwear.
- Take breaks if sitting for long periods, especially in hot environments.

Get tested for STIs

- It's good to get checked (and treated if needed) for an STI before trying to conceive because:
 - Some STIs can affect male and female fertility.
 - Some STIs can cause health problems for the mum and her baby, during and after pregnancy.
 - Some treatments for STIs are not suitable during pregnancy.
- Not all STIs have symptoms, so a sexual partner may have had an infection without knowing it.

Review medications and substances

- Consult your doctor or pharmacist about any medicines or supplements you take.
- Avoid illegal drugs.
- Anabolic steroids harm fertility
- Consider environmental exposures: Limit contact with harmful chemicals, metals, or pesticides.