

Fertility Health for Women

The myth that infertility is a woman's problem is untrue. Infertility is equally a female and male problem, and often a combined problem.

It is important to consult a physician for a pre-conception visit, to prepare for pregnancy, BEFORE you become pregnant.

Some of your doctor's advice might include:

- ▶ *Shape Up:* Eat a healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy and protein.
- ▶ *Exercise:* Cardiovascular exercise will help get your blood circulating, which increases blood flow to the reproductive system and encourages regular ovulation and normal hormone levels.
- ▶ *Get Healthy:* Stop drinking, smoking or taking drugs. Caffeine should also be limited to one cup a day.
- ▶ *Take Supplements:* Take folic acid, which prevents birth defects, and calcium.

Your doctor may also look at/for:

- ▶ *Age Factors:* As you get older, the quality of your eggs begins to deteriorate, causing difficulty in getting pregnant and the increased risk for birth defects.
- ▶ *Regularity of Your Period:* Chronic health problems, or the medications used to treat them, can interrupt ovulation or cause irregular menstrual cycles.
- ▶ *Adhesions and Scarring:* Caused by sexually transmitted diseases, endometriosis or prior abdominal surgeries.
- ▶ *Medication:* Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, radiation and chemotherapy, antihistamine and decongestants may lead to fertility problems.
- ▶ *Obesity:* Excess weight can lead to elevated estrogen levels which act as birth control.
- ▶ *Recurrent miscarriage/pregnancy loss:* three or more miscarriages.

Techniques to help identify your most fertile days:

- ▶ *Know when you Ovulate:* In a regular, 28 day cycle, "Day 1" is the first day of your period. "Day 14" is the day that most women will ovulate, or release an egg.
- ▶ *Basal Body Temperature:* Taken first thing every morning, your basal temperature will increase slightly when you ovulate. Be sure to keep a chart to share with your doctor.
- ▶ *Ovulation Kits:* Kits measure the amount of luteinizing hormone (LH) in the urine. These kits can predict that ovulation will occur within 24-36 hours.

It is recommended that couples trying to conceive should have intercourse every other day, around ovulation, as sperm can live inside a woman for about 48 hours.

It is essential that both partners be assessed during a thorough infertility evaluation, as over 80% of problems can be helped with the proper medical treatment. Couples should see a fertility specialist if they have been trying to conceive for a year without success. Women over 40 should make an appointment after trying for 6 months.

This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.

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For more information about women's health issues, stop by our Resource Center at 2000 West First Street, Piedmont Plaza II, 1st Floor, Winston Salem, NC 27104, visit our website at <http://www.wakehealth.edu/WHCOE/> or contact us at (336) 713-4220.