

To get pregnant you need to have sex around the time you are ovulating, usually day 14-15 of your cycle (see *Yarning about periods*).

How long will it take to get pregnant?

If you and your partner are both fertile, you are not using contraception and you are having sex regularly you will probably (more than 85 women out of 100) get pregnant in a year. After two years of trying, 95 out of 100 women will be pregnant.

Sometimes it will take longer or you might need help to get pregnant.

Getting pregnant can take longer if you or your partner is over 30, overweight, or you smoke (cigarettes and/or marijuana) or drink alcohol.

Why pregnancy might not occur

Not getting pregnant can be caused by problems with the woman (40%), the man (40%) or both (10%). Sometimes the cause is unknown.

What female problems can prevent pregnancy?

Age

When you are born you have about one million eggs in each ovary. Some of these eggs are released when you have your period. But as you get older the rest of the eggs disappear and break down and by the time you reach menopause (when the periods stop), there are no eggs left.

As you get older it takes longer to get pregnant and the health of your eggs decreases. From 32 your fertility starts to decrease and by 40 it is reduced by half. If you have been trying to get pregnant for more than a year you should see a doctor. If you are over 35 years old, you should see a doctor if you have been trying for six months or more. If you are not having monthly periods you should see a doctor.

Ovulation

Hormones in your body control when an egg is released from one of your ovaries each month. Hormone problems can stop the egg growing in the ovary and your period might not come.

These problems can be caused by:

- Weight: being overweight or underweight can stop ovaries releasing an egg, making it hard to get pregnant
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is common in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It causes women to have more male hormones and makes periods irregular so this can make it harder to get pregnant (see *Yarning about PCOS*).

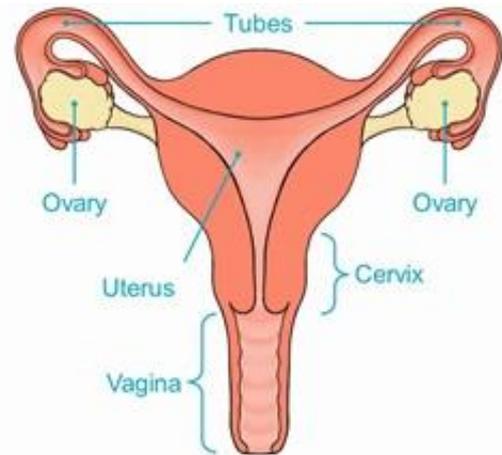
Eggs

Things that can affect the health of your eggs are:

- your age
- smoking
- your family history or genetics
- cancer treatment such as radiation or chemotherapy

Fallopian tube blockage

Fig. 1 Female reproductive organs



The fallopian tubes connect the ovaries to the uterus. So if the tubes get blocked the sperm and the egg can't meet and you can't get pregnant.

Tubes can get blocked by

- sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- or endometriosis

What male problems can prevent pregnancy?

Sperm

Problems with sperm (number, movement and shape) can reduce your chance of getting pregnant.

Some things that affect the number and health of the sperm

- a history of sexually transmitted infections e.g. chlamydia

- certain medical, hormonal or genetic conditions
- alcohol (more than 2 drinks per day)
- smoking
- marijuana
- being overweight
- some prescription medications
- cancer treatment

Age

The health of a man's sperm decreases with age. The amount of semen that he produces and the ability of sperm to swim towards an egg decreases between the ages of 20 and 80.

This can mean it takes longer to get pregnant or you might need help like IVF to get pregnant.

How to improve your fertility

Some causes of infertility might need medical or surgical treatment while others you might be able to improve yourself. These are things you and your partner can do improve your fertility and chance of getting pregnant:

- reach or maintain a healthy weight
- eat a healthy and balanced diet
- stop smoking cigarettes
- stop smoking/using marijuana and other drugs
- reduce or stop alcohol intake
- you can try and monitor your cycle and see if you notice any changes around

ovulation (pain with ovulation, mucous discharge from vagina changes from thick and white to clear (like uncooked egg white) and stretchy, which helps the sperm to swim more easily

- use ovulation tests to help to recognise when the egg is being released

When to see a doctor about your fertility?

You and your partner should see a doctor if you are trying to get pregnant and:

- you do not have periods or have irregular periods
- you have been trying for 12 months or more
- you are 35 or over and have been trying for 6 months

It is also important to have a pre-pregnancy check up to make sure you are in the best health possible before you get pregnant.

What will the doctor do?

The doctor will ask questions about how long you been trying to get pregnant and your medical history. You might need to have some tests (semen, blood and ultrasound) to see what is causing the problem.

What treatment is available for fertility problems?

There are different treatments depending on the cause of the infertility.

For a woman

- Blocked tubes might need surgery or assisted reproductive technology (ART) e.g. IVF to get pregnant
- If you are not ovulating you might need to try and improve your lifestyle (no smoking or alcohol) and reduce your weight. If this does not work you might need hormone tablets to help you get pregnant.
- If you have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) you might need hormone tablets or other treatment.

For a man

- If a man has sperm problems (low count, quality or movement) ART may be required
- If he is producing sperm but tubes are blocked ART may be required
- If he has hormone or other medical problems he might need treatment

It's not always possible to know why you are infertile so IVF or other forms of ART may be the only way to get pregnant.

Assisted reproductive technology (ART)

This just means ways to get pregnant artificially or partly artificially. There are different ways to do this and in vitro fertilisation (IVF) is one of these. In IVF the sperm and the egg are taken from the man and the woman and fertilised outside the body. The fertilised egg is then put in the woman's uterus and she hopefully gets pregnant.

FEATURED ARTWORK

"Ancestors Knowledge"

by Kate Russell

