

## Fertility & pregnancy

### What does fertility and infertility mean?

Fertility requires healthy sperm from the male to successfully make its way to a healthy egg, penetrate the egg and for that egg to successfully implant in the lining of the uterus. A problem at any of these steps can affect your fertility.

Infertility is defined as 12 months of regular unprotected intercourse without conception or pregnancy.

### What affects fertility?

- Fertility declines with age. Women are born with all the eggs they will ever have and these are either released at ovulation, around mid-month of your cycle, disappear or deteriorate
- Being overweight or underweight can reduce fertility by causing hormonal changes and ovulation problems
- A strong relationship exists between both active and passive smoking and fertility problems
- Research suggests heavy drinking affects fertility, including the time it takes to get pregnant and the chances of having a live, healthy baby
- Some prescription, over the counter or complementary medications may affect fertility. If you are planning to get pregnant, talk to your doctor to make sure the medications you are taking are safe
- Sexually transmissible infections (STIs), particularly chlamydia and gonorrhoea,

can affect the fertility of women and men

- Lots of caffeine, such as coffee and cola, may prolong how long it takes to get pregnant
- Repeated exposure to heavy metals and industrial chemicals may reduce fertility and increase the risk of miscarriage and birth defects

### Trying for pregnancy

When you start trying for a baby there are many things that can help you. This includes being the healthiest you can be, managing stress and generally caring for yourself. Understanding about ovulation, and when the best time is to try for conception, can also help.



### What is the best time for conception?

There are certain days in a woman's menstrual cycle when pregnancy is more possible. This is during the five days before ovulation and the day of ovulation. These days are the 'fertile window' of opportunity to conceive. The likelihood of becoming pregnant is dramatically increased if you have intercourse in the three days leading up to, and including, ovulation.

You may like to use an ovulation calculator or predictor kit but the following information might also help:

#### Mucus changes

Around the time of ovulation a woman's vaginal mucus is slick and slippery.

#### Abdominal pain

During ovulation some women experience pain – general or on one side of the abdomen.

#### Premenstrual like symptoms

Such as, breast tenderness, abdominal bloating and/or moodiness.

### How do you improve your chances of pregnancy?

See your doctor for pre-pregnancy planning. This may include:

- a reproductive health check including a detailed history and examination looking for genetic or medical conditions, medication and substance use, and an immunisation review (eg whooping cough and rubella)
- blood tests to check for hormone changes to determine if ovulation is occurring
- partner assessment, such as a sperm test

Fertility starts to decline after about 28 years of age, drops significantly after 35 years and drops dramatically after 40 years. Assisted reproductive methods can help, but each woman's situation is individual.

### Having trouble conceiving?

If you don't conceive when you plan to it can be frustrating and an emotional rollercoaster ride. Infertility is more common than most people think. Up to 15% of couples who try for a baby will experience fertility problems. It can be devastating when months go by without a much wanted pregnancy happening and it's well known that infertility can cause emotional distress and may lead to relationship problems.

Trouble conceiving can be caused by problems with ovulation, blocked fallopian tubes, endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), premature menopause, fibroids, thyroid problems and sperm problems. There are a number of investigations your doctor can perform to determine the cause of your infertility. There are also many treatment options available and your doctor can determine what is appropriate for you.

Sometimes infertility can't be explained and there is no clear reason why you are unable to conceive a child; see your doctor if you are worried it is taking a long time to conceive.

**For more information go to** [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/fertility-pregnancy](http://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/fertility-pregnancy)

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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