

Fertility factors for life!

The Health Column

Sep
2015

Did you know that approximately 9 per cent of couples have difficulty conceiving?

Key factors which can affect fertility include age, weight, smoking, alcohol use, and timing.

Fertility Week (1–7 September 2015) will focus on the various factors that can influence fertility. Being overweight can affect a women's chances of conceiving and having a healthy baby, and can affect a man's fertility. Factors which many people are unaware of are the effects of caffeine, alcohol, and smoking.



The Fertility Coalition (yourfertility.org.au) produces a range of information dealing with caffeine, alcohol, and smoking. The Coalition points out that there is an increasing body of evidence that these lifestyle factors can adversely affect fertility. These factors can be modified, so making a few healthy lifestyle changes can make it easier to conceive.

Both active and passive smoking reduce male and female fertility, and are harmful for the growing baby. It has also been found that male and female smoking significantly reduces the chance of conception and live birth rates, and increases the risk of miscarriage. It is recommended that men and women, who smoke and wish to conceive, stop smoking. For couples where one or both partners smoke, factual information about the risks of smoking and active support to stop smoking can be obtained from your local pharmacy. This includes treatment with nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).

Based on existing evidence, recommendations also suggest women try to limit their caffeine intake to the equivalent of 1–2 cups of coffee per day. Additionally, current recommendations are that women trying to conceive, and pregnant women, should avoid drinking alcohol all together.

The Fertility Coalition also has information on the impact of exercise on fertility. The Coalition reports there is some evidence that moderate exercise benefits fertility, while high-intensity and high-frequency exercise may adversely affect fertility. For men and women who are overweight or obese, achieving and maintaining a modest weight loss may improve fertility and will improve other obesity-related health problems.

All couples trying to conceive should consider *Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Adults (18-64 years)*. These guidelines suggest consulting your doctor

for advice on the best types of physical activity for you. Activity can be accumulated by being active on most, preferably all, days every week.

If you currently do no physical activity, start by doing some – 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity – and gradually build up to the recommended amount – 300 minutes (5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity. Moderate intensity activities take some effort, but you are still able to talk while doing them. For example, a brisk walk, recreational swimming, dancing, social tennis, golf, household tasks like cleaning windows or raking leaves, or pushing a stroller.

Finally, keeping a daily record of your menstrual cycle can help you recognise when you are more fertile in order to plan a pregnancy.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff can advise on key fertility factors including age, weight, smoking, alcohol use, and timing. Many pharmacies also offer professional services to assist you with these fertility factors. Your local pharmacy can also provide you with products used to monitor your menstrual cycle in order to help you recognise the 'fertile window' – the best time to try and conceive. This is different for different women.

In addition, you can get more information on key fertility factors from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include topics such as *Pregnancy and ovulation* and *Menstrual Chart*, as well as lifestyle topics such as *Alcohol*, *Staying a non-smoker*, and *Weight and health*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.