

Helping your Fertility – Male

In about one in five couples with fertility problems the cause will be found to be related to sperm problems e.g. low numbers of sperm or poor motility of the sperm. In another 2 out of five couples, sperm problems will contribute to the difficulty but there will be female issues as well. All factors need to be taken into account when assessing any couple and so it is important for both partners to attend their doctor together.

How is male fertility evaluated?

A semen analysis will be the initial step. The semen is normally collected in a sterile container by masturbation. The semen test gives important information about the number, movement and shape (known as morphology) of sperm.

If the semen analysis reveals problems with the sperm count, movement and/or shape, a repeat test is generally arranged to confirm the problem. Illness or medications three months prior to the test can impair sperm ejaculated on the day of examination. If the repeat is abnormal further tests may include:

- A blood test to check your fertility hormones.
- Ultrasound scan of the scrotum to detect any possible blockage.
- Genetic tests in some cases which will help assess any potential additional “heritable” risks to your children.

Results of the relevant selected tests, along with a discussion of your medical history and personal wishes will help the specialist to guide you to the best treatment options.

Improving your Chances

Regular Intercourse

- Long periods of abstinence can decrease the quality of the sperm. Sexual intercourse or ejaculation (two or three times per week) is recommended.
- This may seem obvious but if you are not having intercourse around the time that your partner is ovulating, she is not going to conceive.
- If couples are having very frequent intercourse (i.e. 3 times or more per week) there is no need to try to predict ovulation. If sex is less frequent, however, you need to know the fertile time and have intercourse every day or every second day during this time.
- Some commercial lubricants may make the sperm move slower and decrease their ability to survive. You may want to discuss lubricants with your doctor/ pharmacist since there are a few lubricants that are believed to be safe for use when trying for a baby.
- Some couples experience difficulties with intercourse. Should this be the case you should discuss this further with your fertility doctor.

Diet/ Vitamin supplements

- Obesity has been clearly linked to impaired sperm production. If you are overweight, you should attempt to attain an ideal body weight. Abdominal fat is a risk factor because the

female hormone oestrogen can be produced there and this can unbalance the male hormone testosterone.

- Recent studies suggest a beneficial effect of antioxidants on male infertility by protecting sperm from damage. Antioxidants such as vitamins E and C are found in most multi-vitamins. Fruits and vegetables also provide a natural source of antioxidants and should be part of a balanced and healthy diet.

Smoking/ Recreational drug use

- Smoking is associated with reduced sperm quality, and men who are trying to conceive should consider stopping immediately.
- Recreational drugs, including anabolic steroids and marijuana, are associated with impaired sperm function and should be avoided.

Alcohol

- Avoid excessive alcohol intake which is detrimental to semen quality. Do not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week.

Keep Cool

- The testes should be a couple of degrees cooler than the rest of the body for maximum sperm production.
- Some studies suggest that wearing tight underwear may raise temperature around the scrotum and cause a decrease in sperm quality.
- Avoid hot baths, heated car seats, saunas or lap tops on the lap.

A man's fertility reflects his general health. Men who live a healthy lifestyle are more likely to produce healthy sperm. Additionally it's also very important to remember that it can take just three months to improve sperm.