Understand and Support Your Fertility

A Guide for Women

What is infertility?

Infertility is the inability to cause a pregnancy, become pregnant, or maintain a pregnancy.

Often defined as an inability to get pregnant after 12 months of unprotected sex—or after 6 months for ages 35 years and up—infertility can happen for many reasons.

Problems in the male or female reproductive system can cause infertility. In some cases, infertility may be caused by underlying health conditions and be a sign that something is wrong.

About 1 in **8** couples are affected by infertility. It can be devastating and cause emotional distress.

Understanding and addressing the root causes of infertility can help you take steps to protect your reproductive health, and your own long-term health, too.

Work with your healthcare provider to support your reproductive health.

Start by asking your provider:

» *Do I have any health conditions that could affect my fertility? How might these affect my fertility?*

» *Am I up-to-date on screenings for conditions that could affect my health and fertility?*

» *What does a normal menstrual cycle (period) look like? Is my cycle normal?*

» *What actions can I take to be as healthy as I can—for my overall health and for any future pregnancies?*

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What is fertility and how does it work?

Fertility is the ability to cause pregnancy, or to become pregnant and to carry the pregnancy to a healthy stage.

Fertility requires these steps:

1. Eggs and sperm are healthy

2. An egg is released (ovulation)

3. The egg and sperm join (fertilization)

4. The fertilized egg attaches to the uterus (implantation)

5. The pregnancy continues and grows

These steps rely on the overall health of both partners. Problems at any step can affect fertility.

Common root causes of infertility

- **Hormonal imbalance**
  (e.g., PCOS, thyroid disorders)

- **Untreated medical conditions**
  (e.g., hypertension or STIs, such as chlamydia)

- **Blocked fallopian tubes**
  (e.g., from Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, or PID)

- **Endometriosis**
  (a condition leading to inflammation and scarring)

- **Age**

- **Medical treatments**
  (e.g., chemotherapy)

- **Genetics or birth defects**

In about 80% of infertility cases a root cause can be identified and addressed.

Addressing root causes early can help reduce challenges with fertility later.

Support your fertility

Address health concerns early

Avoid smoking, alcohol, and non-medical drug use
(e.g., marijuana)

Limit caffeine
(e.g., less than 3 cups of coffee per day)

Maintain a healthy body weight
(e.g., a BMI between 19 and 30)

Eat a well-balanced diet of protein, vegetables, fruits, and whole grains

Engage in regular, moderate physical activity

Manage chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes

Protect against STIs.
Limit sexual partners; use condoms; get screened regularly

Avoid toxic chemicals
(e.g. endocrine disruptors)

Get enough sleep and reduce stress