

Male Infertility

Description:

Infertility is defined as the failure to achieve a pregnancy after one year of regular (at least twice weekly) unprotected intercourse with the same partner.

Both partners should be checked for infertility. Male infertility is indicated when, after checking both partners, problems in reproductive function have been identified in the male partner.

Symptoms:

It is important to see a doctor who can do the necessary investigations to see if there is a reason for you and your partner not being able to fall pregnant.

The known causes of male infertility can be categorised as:

- Hormonal problems. This relates to the failure of the pituitary gland at the base of the brain to stimulate the testes. These disorders are usually referred to as endocrine causes of male infertility, and are relatively rare.
- Sperm production problems. This includes disruption of the production of sperm within the testes or the production of antibodies against sperm which block their function.
- Blockage of sperm. This relates to the obstruction (or blockage) of the tubes leading sperm away from the testes, namely in the epididymis and vas deferens, into the semen.
- Erection and ejaculation problems. This relates to problems of erection and ejaculation that are necessary for normal sexual intercourse.
- Unknown problems There are still gaps in our knowledge and for 40% of men with male infertility, the cause of the problem is unknown.

Treatment:

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Prevention:

Lifestyle factors can play a role in male infertility.

- Cigarette smoking: Some reports suggest that cigarette smoking may have a negative effect on semen quality. However, results of studies are unclear but because of this uncertainty, quitting smoking should be considered.
- Alcohol: Moderate alcohol consumption (one to two standard drinks per day) does not appear to have an effect on sperm production. However, drinking excessive alcohol may cause associated liver problems and a negative effect on health in general.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): Sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia may lead to damage and blockage of the epididymis, preventing sperm from passing from the testes into the

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ejaculate. It is important that treatment of STIs is sought from your doctor immediately to prevent the spread of the disease to your female partner and possible blockages of the male reproductive tract.

- Heat stress: There is ongoing debate about the effect of underwear styles on sperm production, and whether or not looser (cooler) boxer shorts should be preferred over tighter (warmer) briefs. Some research has suggested that wearing tight underwear may decrease sperm counts, although other studies have not found this to be the case. Doctors usually advise patients to reduce the possibility of heat stress on sperm production by avoiding regular hot baths and tight-fitting underwear.
- Vaginal lubricants: Most vaginal lubricants are toxic to sperm. If couples are trying to conceive, the use of vaginal lubricants should be avoided.
- Undescended testes: Early treatment before the age of two years is recommended.

Help and Assistance

It is important to see a doctor who can do the necessary investigations to see if there is a reason for you and your partner not being able to fall pregnant.

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Other Resources

Men, Sex and Reproductive Health

[Family Planning Queensland](#) [Queensland Health Sexual Health website](#)

Footnotes

[Andrology Australia](#) – Facts about male infertility

HealthInsite Information:

[Male infertility](#)