



PROTECT YOUR FERTILITY

**A GUIDE FOR
PREVENTION**

American Society of Reproductive Medicine

WHAT IS INFERTILITY, ANYWAY?

INFERTILITY IS NOT MERELY AN INCONVENIENCE.
INFERTILITY IS NOT JUST A WOMAN'S PROBLEM.
INFERTILITY IS NOT INEVITABLE.

*Infertility is a **disease** of the reproductive organs of both men and women that impairs one of the body's most basic functions: the ability to have children.*

WHAT IS A DISEASE? A disease is defined as any deviation from or interruption of the normal structure or function of any part, organ, or system, or combination thereof, of the body that is manifested by a characteristic set of symptoms or signs. *Dorland's Medical Dictionary 1988:481.*

And just like diseases such as lung cancer and HIV/AIDS, infertility can often be prevented, but only if you are aware of certain risk factors well in advance of trying to conceive. *Smoking, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), age, unhealthy body weight and using steroids* are some of the preventable causes of infertility. This brochure briefly explains how such behaviors put your fertility at risk. Decisions and choices that you make in your teens and early twenties can affect your fertility for years to come.

This prevention guide was written by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine to educate men and women about infertility, but it is by no means all-inclusive. See your doctor for further information, and check our resource guide for more ways to investigate this disease.



Infertility affects about 6.1 million people in the United States alone: more than ten percent of the reproductive-age population—both men and women.



FEMALE RISK FACTORS

I'm Not Ready for Kids; Why Should I Care About Infertility?

Just because you aren't ready for children now, doesn't mean you should hurt your chances of *ever* having them. Behaviors you engage in before (even years before) you are ready to have children can impact your future ability to conceive. If you wait to consider your fertility until you're ready for a family, you may be too late.

What Can I Do?

Avoid Risky Behaviors

SMOKING If you smoke, you are most likely aware of the many health risks involved. But you probably don't know that smoking also can affect your ability to have children. Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, MD, clearly stated in his warning about smoking that women who smoke have decreased fertility. In fact, a study in Great Britain showed that up to 13 percent of female infertility is caused by cigarette smoking. Menopause (ovarian failure) occurs about two years earlier in women who smoke. Quitting smoking will not only benefit your health and lengthen your life; it also will help protect your fertility. **For more information about smoking, visit the American Lung Association's website at www.lungusa.org.**

WEIGHT Twelve percent of all infertility cases are a result of women either weighing too little or too much. As a culture obsessed with body image, the American paradox is that we are both starving ourselves and gaining more weight by the minute. Both excess and deficiency of body fat can lead to infertility. To protect your chances of conceiving, maintain a healthy weight through proper nutrition and exercise. **For more information about nutrition, visit the American Dietetic Association's website at www.eatright.org.**

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Everyone knows that if you don't practice safe sex, you might get pregnant. However, most people don't know that if you don't use a condom now, you may *never* get pregnant in the future. Sexually transmitted

infections (STIs) such as chlamydia and gonorrhea are a leading cause of female infertility, often have no symptoms and can be prevented by regular use of condoms. If you want to improve your chances of having a baby in the future, practice safe sex now. **For more information about STIs, visit the Center for Disease Control's website section on STI prevention at www.cdc.gov.**

AGE It is a biological fact that there is a decrease in fertility with advancing age. As many women delay childbearing, there has come to be an unrealistic expectation that medical science can undo the effects of aging. While women and their partners must be the ones to decide the best time (and if) to have children, women in their twenties and early thirties are most likely to conceive. **For more information about the effects of age, visit the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's website at www.asrm.org.**

What Else Can You Do?

1. Visit your ob-gyn annually. In addition to cancer detection, you can also protect your fertility.
2. Listen to your body—if you have irregular or painful menstrual cycles, your body may be trying to tell you something. See your doctor.



unhealthy body weight



age



STIs



smoking

MALE RISK FACTORS



I'm A Guy; Isn't this a Woman's Issue?

Infertility is not just a female disease, men suffer as well. In fact, new studies show that male infertility accounts for nearly half of all diagnosed cases of infertility. If you wait to consider fertility until you're ready to have a family, you may be too late.



unhealthy
body weight



age



STIs



smoking

What Can I Do?

Avoid Risky Behaviors

STERIODS, SMOKING AND

ALCOHOL Drugs such as steroids, cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol can negatively impact your health in many ways, including greatly affecting your virility, leading to abnormally shaped sperm, decreased sperm motility and/or decreased sperm production. To improve your chances of conceiving in the future, avoid drugs now. **For more information about substance abuse, visit the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information's website at www.health.org.**

EXPOSURE TO HEAT While it may sound peculiar, prolonged exposure to high heat, such as that of a hot tub, can affect your fertility by lowering sperm production. In addition, men whose occupations require long hours of sitting or who wear heat retaining clothes also experience decreased sperm production. To protect your fertility, avoid prolonged exposure to direct heat. **For more information about the affects of heat, visit the American Society for Reproductive Medicine's website at www.asrm.org.**

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) don't just affect a women's fertility. Everyone knows that if you don't practice safe sex, you might get your partner pregnant. However, most people don't know that if you don't wear a condom now, you may *never* be able to get anyone pregnant in the future. STIs such as chlamydia and gonorrhea are a leading cause of male infertility, often have no symptoms, and can be prevented by regular use of condoms. If you want to improve your chances of having a baby in the future, practice safe sex now. **For more information about STIs, visit the Center for Disease Control's website section on STI prevention at www.cdc.gov.**

What Else Can You Do?

1. Listen to your body. If you've been exposed to an STI, see your doctor immediately.
2. If you have an undescended testicle or loss of testicular size, see your doctor. Fertility is something that you should start thinking about as early as possible. Begin a dialogue about this with your doctor early.

In approximately 40 percent of infertile couples, the male partner is either the sole cause or a contributing cause of infertility.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The purpose of this guide is to help you think about how current actions can impact your fertility. If you recognize symptoms that can cause infertility, you should seek help. While infertility is a disease, it is in many cases preventable. The only way to protect your fertility is to be educated about the risks. Use this guide as a starting point to gather more information on infertility, and initiate further research with the resources listed below. Remember—while there is a lot of good information about infertility available, there also is a lot of misinformation. Use what you learn as discussion points with your doctor.

RESOURCES

American Society for Reproductive Medicine:

www.protectyourfertility.org, www.asrm.org,
Call toll-free: 866-228-6906

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists:

www.acog.org
202-638-5577

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association (Infertility Support Organization):

www.resolve.org
617-623-0744

EDUCATIONAL READING MATERIALS

Complete Guide to Fertility. ASRM Ed. Sandra Carson, M.D. and Peter Casson, M.D.

Find a Doctor in Your Area:

Visit www.asrm.org to find an ASRM member doctor