

# What You Should Know About Causes of Infertility

*Infertility is the inability to get pregnant within one year of having unprotected intercourse. Infertility may be due to physical or emotional factors, male or female reproductive problems, or even environmental or lifestyle issues.*

## How does pregnancy occur?

For a woman to become pregnant, one of her eggs must unite with the man's sperm at just the right time. For this to happen, an egg must be released from the ovary and travel through the fallopian tube toward the uterus. The man's sperm must join the egg along the way, which means he must ejaculate and his sperm must travel up through the vagina, cervix, and uterus to the fallopian tube. The sperm then fertilizes the egg, which means they connect to each other. The fertilized egg then must attach to the inside of the uterus, and the woman's body must nurture it until birth. If any of these steps is interrupted or does not happen, infertility results.

## How do I know whether I am infertile or if the timing has just not been right?

In any given month of having regular intercourse, a woman has a 20% to 25% chance of getting pregnant. This decreases after age 35.

Some lifestyle changes may improve your chances for pregnancy, such as eating a healthy diet, exercising, lowering stress, and stopping cigarette, alcohol, and drug use. Having regular intercourse between days 7 and 18 after your period starts will increase your chances. If you still do not get pregnant within a year of trying, your health care professional can provide a physical examination to assess the reasons.

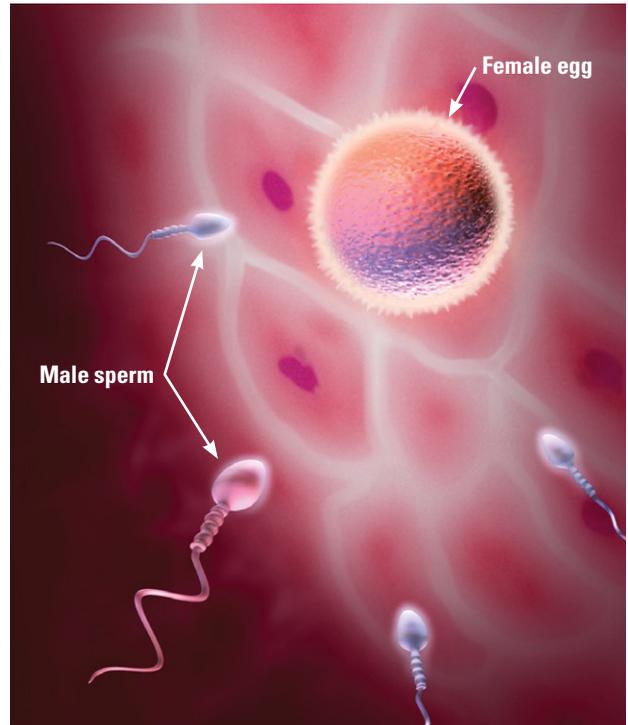
## What conditions in women contribute to infertility?

The most common causes of female infertility are problems with the release of the egg from the ovary, a process called ovulation. Some symptoms may be pain with your menstrual period, not getting your period, or having irregular periods. Another cause of infertility is uterine fibroids, which are noncancerous tumors in the uterus.

Infertility may also result from autoimmune disorders, blood clotting disorders, birth defects, chronic diseases, obesity, sexually transmitted disease, or hormone imbalances.

## What conditions in men contribute to infertility?

Men experience infertility when there is a decrease in the number of sperm released, the sperm is blocked from release, or the sperm does not function as it should. This may be caused by many factors, including genetic abnor-



malities, hormone excess or deficiency, infection, impotence, older age, and past medical treatments or surgery. Environmental factors may include pollutants or extended exposure to high heat. The lifestyle issues mentioned above may also impact fertility in men.

## Is there help for infertility?

The cause of infertility can be determined in about 80% to 85% of patients. Your clinician can provide treatments targeted to the problem; with the right therapy, about 50% to 60% of couples will be able to become pregnant. With no treatment, up to 20% of infertile couples will eventually conceive.

In addition to recommending lifestyle adjustments, your clinician may prescribe medications or offer surgery to correct reproductive problems. Intrauterine insemination, where a woman is injected with carefully prepared sperm, is another option, and other assisted reproduction technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, are also available.

Infertility may have an emotional impact, such as depression or anxiety, so it is important to understand that these are natural reactions to the stress involved. Your health care professional can provide the tests, treatments, and support you need to deal with the condition and improve your chances of becoming pregnant.