

## Gynaecological Conditions Patient information Leaflet

### General Fertility Advice

#### Summary

- ✍ When am I most fertile and how often should we be making love?
- ✍ How does age affect fertility?
- ✍ Does weight affect fertility?
- ✍ Do smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs affect the chance of conceiving?
- ✍ How can we improve the sperm count and quality?
- ✍ Do 'stress levels' affect fertility?
- ✍ Does the position in which we make love have any effect on our chances of conceiving?

#### **Q: When am I most fertile and how often should we be making love?**

Ovulation usually occurs 14 days before your period starts, therefore on day 14 if your cycle is 28 days long. If your cycle is 26 days long then you would ovulate on day 12, and on day 16 in a 30 day cycle.

Ideally you should start trying 2-3 days before your expected ovulation and continue to make love every 2-3 days afterwards. There is no need to make love every day, unless you want to, alternate days being quite adequate. This also allows the sperm a chance to 'build up'. The sperm, however, should not be saved up until your anticipated ovulation and making love 2-3 times a week gives the best quality sperm for the fertile period.

#### **Q: How does age affect fertility?**

Age related fertility problems increase after the woman is 35 and dramatically over the age of 40. IVF is no cure for this with very poor results over the age of 40 (less than 10% pregnancy rate). There is also some evidence that some rare abnormalities are more common in the children of older men.

A woman's age also adversely affects the outcome of the pregnancy with increased miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies and chromosomal (genetic) abnormalities. Pregnancy diseases such as pre-eclampsia are also increased in the older woman as are other non related disorders such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Although this all sounds very depressing many women have babies successfully in their 40's but conception is usually on their own at home rather than by modern assisted conception technologies.

**Q: Does weight affect fertility?**

Being overweight (Body Mass Index (BMI) >30) or underweight (BMI <19) both have a dramatic effect on female fertility. Being overweight or underweight is associated with the periods being irregular or absent. Hence ovulation may not occur, thus substantially reducing your chances of getting pregnant.

Loosing or gaining weight, by attention to your diet and exercise, can have significant effects on your fertility and is something you can do yourself before being referred to the infertility clinic. The government (NICE Guidelines) have also said that NHS funded treatment by IVF is not available if your BMI is less than 19 or more than 30. This itself should be a major incentive to increase or reduce your weight if appropriate.

**Q: Do smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs affect the chance of conceiving?**

Smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs all have a general depressant effect on female fertility, and alcohol is particularly harmful as it can in excess affect your newborn baby. Alcohol and marijuana are very damaging to the sperm, reducing the motility and increasing the number of damaged or abnormal forms of sperm.

If there is one thing you can do personally to improve your chances of getting pregnant, it would be to stop smoking, reduce your alcohol consumption and avoid recreational drugs, particularly marijuana.

**Q: How can we improve the sperm count and quality?**

Stopping smoking, reducing alcohol and avoiding recreational drugs is the biggest thing you can do to improve the sperm count. Avoiding very hot baths, wearing boxer shorts, improving general fitness and weight reduction also help.

It takes three months before the sperm count and quality improve after lifestyle changes, so do not expect immediate results.

**Q: Do 'stress levels' affect fertility?**

There is no question that infertility causes major stress in your lives. Other stresses at home and at work can reduce your chances of conceiving in the short term, when no physical abnormality has been found. Reducing your stress levels, looking at your home-work balance and allowing time for each other can improve your chances of getting pregnant.

If either of you are having difficulty coping with the stress that infertility causes, then some counselling can be very beneficial. Alternative therapies such as acupuncture, reflexology and hypnotherapy may also have a role to play

**Q: Does the position in which we make love have any effect on our chances of conceiving?**

There is no evidence that the position of lovemaking has any effect on whether or not you get pregnant. It is sensible to lie down for about 20 minutes afterwards to allow the sperm to move up into the uterus.

**Contact details**

**Weight Loss Clinics**

Weight Watchers	0845 7123000
Slimming World	01773 521111
Local (Mid Sussex)	01444-444782

**Smoking Cessation Clinics (NHS)**

National	0900 169 0169
Local (Brighton)	01273 267397
(Mid Sussex)	01444 475769

**Counselling Services**

Women and Children	(Brighton)	01273 381210
	(Mid Sussex)	0800 174319

**Alcohol & Drugs**

Local (Brighton)	01273 696970
(Mid Sussex)	01444 441811 ext 8510