

Smoking, Alcohol and Other Drugs

Studies indicate that smoking strongly contributes to infertility. Women who smoke may reduce their chances of becoming pregnant, increase their chance of miscarriage or reduce the effectiveness of infertility treatment. Men who smoke may have a lower sperm count. Exposure to secondhand smoke also affects fertility in men and women.

There is no safe level of alcohol use during conception or pregnancy. Alcohol use contributes to infertility by affecting the ability to conceive or to produce a healthy child.

Talk with your health-care provider about any prescription or over-the-counter medications regularly taken. Avoid illegal drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. Steroid use (taken to increase muscle strength and growth) may cause decreased sperm production and testicular changes.

Delaying Pregnancy

A woman's ability to reproduce tends to decrease with age, particularly during her late 30s.



Cancer

Cancer of the reproductive organs can result in infertility. Chemotherapy or other cancer treatments can affect ovulation and sperm production. Men and women who engage in sexual activity at an early age or have multiple sexual partners are at greater risk for developing cancer of the reproductive organs.

Human papilloma virus (HPV) has been associated with cases of cervical cancer and is the cause of genital warts. A HPV vaccine is now available that can reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer.

To reduce the risk of cancer of the reproductive organs, delay sexual activity, use condoms and limit sexual partners. Women should have a yearly pap smear for early detection and should consult their health-care provider for HPV vaccine recommendations. Men should learn testicular self-exam and have regular checkups by their health-care provider.

Family Planning Program

Family planning programs educate and counsel clients, obtain medical histories and provide thorough physical exams. They also may advise on fertility awareness techniques, check for sexually transmitted infections and/or refer couples to infertility specialists.

This handout covers infertility briefly. If you are interested in more information, please contact the Family Planning Clinic in your area, or your private health-care provider.

For more information, contact the North Dakota Department of Health Family Planning Program
800.472.2286



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*Protecting
Fertility in
Men and Women*



Fertility:

Women: the ability to become pregnant and have a baby.

Men: the ability to make a woman pregnant.

What Is Infertility?

Infertility is the inability to achieve pregnancy during a year or more of unprotected intercourse. The condition may be present in either or both partners and may be reversible. In the United States, about 10 percent to 15 percent of all couples are infertile.

What Causes Female Infertility?

- Pelvic inflammatory disease (the major cause of infertility worldwide)
- Ovary problems (infrequent ovulation)
- Ectopic pregnancies or miscarriages
- Endometriosis
- Congenital uterus abnormality
- Insufficient hormones
- Endocrine disorders (thyroid or diabetes)



What Causes Male Infertility?

- Decreased sperm production (quality and quantity)
- Viral disturbances (mumps)
- Trauma to the testes

What Are the Causes of Infertility for Either Men or Women?

- Underlying medical conditions such as endocrine disorders (diabetes or thyroid)
- Environmental exposures to some chemicals
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

Can Infertility Be Prevented?

It depends upon the cause of the infertility. Eating disorders (anorexia nervosa or bulimia), exposure to toxic chemicals or radiation, and use of some medications, cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs by either the male or female can reduce fertility. Lifestyle changes and preventative health measures can lower your risk of infertility.

How Can STDs Be Prevented?

- Limit sexual partners; the more sexual partners, the greater the chance of exposure to STDs.
- Discuss this sensitive issue with your partner. Know your sexual partner's past history of multiple partners, bisexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, positive HIV and/or injectable drug use. You are susceptible to any infections he or she may have been exposed to.
- Have regular exams. These actions can detect disease early and prevent their spread through early treatment.
- Use condoms every time.
- If you are treated for an STD, be sure your partner also is treated.
- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and HPV (human papillomavirus).

What are the Risk Factors for Infertility?

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Because STDs are sometimes present without symptoms, the infection avoids early detection and treatment. This gives it a better chance to spread and cause more severe problems. These infections might be due to gonorrhea, chlamydia or some other infections.

Possible signs of infection:

- Unusual discharge and/or odor from vagina
- Watery/white or yellowish/thick discharge from penis
- Any blisters, sores, bumps or warts around the genitals and/or anus
- Pain or swelling in the testicles
- Itching and/or irritation of genital area
- Pain with urination or bowel movements
- Persistent fever or "flu-like" symptoms
- Spotty bleeding (if between periods or after sexual intercourse)
- Lower abdominal pain