



Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

PREGNANCY PROBLEMS?

Boost the Chance of Having a Baby



For those who dream of being parents, pregnancy problems can be tremendously frustrating and disappointing. In recent decades, scientists have developed a wide range of approaches to help struggling couples have healthy babies.

Infertility is a fairly common condition. It affects about 1 in 10 couples who are trying to have a baby. Infertility can be traced to the man in about a third of these cases and to the woman in another third. The rest of the time, the difficulties lie with both partners or no cause can be found.

COMMON CULPRITS

Fertility troubles can arise in any of the steps needed for a successful pregnancy. To get pregnant, a woman's body must first release an egg from one of her ovaries, a process called ovulation. The man's sperm then has to join with, or "fertilize," the egg. The egg must then travel through a passageway known as the fallopian tube and head toward the woman's uterus (womb). The fertilized egg must then attach to the inside of the uterus (implantation).

Infertility can be related to a man if there are problems with the number, shape, or movement of sperm. These glitches can make it hard for the sperm to fertilize the egg. About 1 in 5 infertile men have sperm troubles because of a hormone imbalance, which can sometimes be corrected with medication.

"Another common identifiable cause of male infertility

occurs when a man has large veins around the testicle, which makes the whole scrotum warmer than it should be. The heat decreases the production and quality of sperm," says Dr. Peter N. Schlegel, who specializes in treating male infertility at Cornell University. This condition, called varicoceles, is usually harmless, but it can be corrected with surgery if it's causing infertility. Surgery can also help to remove blockages that prevent sperm release.

For women, the most common cause of infertility has to do with ovulation problems, which affect about 40% of women who have pregnancy trouble. "Ovulatory problems occur when a woman ovulates irregularly or not at all," says Dr. Linda Giudice, a reproductive health expert at the University of California, San Francisco. "Causes can include stress-related lack of or irregular periods, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), advanced maternal age, and a variety of other possible factors, like hormone issues that can interrupt normal ovulation."



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Other common causes of female infertility include blocked fallopian tubes or conditions that affect the health of the egg or its implantation after fertilization.

In the United States, older maternal age is a growing contributor to fertility problems. About 1 in 5 women nationwide now have their first child after age 35. Once a woman reaches this age, fertility complications arise in about 1 of every 3 couples trying to have a baby. Studies suggest that after age 30, a woman's chances of getting pregnant decrease every year, especially after age 37.

In some cases, infertility can be corrected through lifestyle changes, such as losing weight or stopping

tobacco use. If this doesn't work, doctors may recommend medication, surgery, artificial insemination (in which a woman is injected with specially prepared sperm), or assisted reproductive technology, which is usually the most expensive and complex option. Assisted reproductive technology includes different methods for fertilizing eggs, usually outside of the body.

For couples who have tried to have a baby without success, experts recommend seeking medical help after at least a year of trying if the woman is younger than 35, or after 6 months if the woman is age 35 or older. It's also a good idea for couples to talk with a health care provider before even trying to get pregnant.

WHAT RAISES YOUR RISK FOR INFERTILITY?

BOTH MEN AND WOMEN:

- Excess alcohol use
- Smoking
- Older age

MEN:

- Environmental toxins, including pesticides and lead
- Health issues such as diabetes, hormone problems, or kidney disease
- Certain medicines
- Radiation treatment and chemotherapy for cancer

WOMEN:

- Stress
- Poor diet
- Being over- or under-weight
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Health problems that cause hormonal changes, such as polycystic ovary syndrome or primary ovarian insufficiency

