



Your Fertility

When to See Your Doctor

Infertility is defined as the inability to become pregnant after one year of unprotected sex. About 12 percent of couples in America suffer from infertility. The fertility problems lie equally with men and women. In reality, it may take a couple of years to conceive, even when nothing is wrong. New tests and procedures are developed each year and the percentage of couples who can't conceive is dropping.

Charting Ovulation

If you're not conceiving as quickly as you thought you might, you may need to pay closer attention to when you ovulate. Several months before you want to conceive, start keeping close track of your menstrual cycle. If you're very regular, you can determine pretty closely when you ovulate by counting back 14 days before your period is set to begin.

When ovulation occurs, an egg, or ovum, is released from one of your ovaries. The egg goes down the fallopian tube toward the uterus. An egg can be fertilized for up to 24 hours after ovulation occurs. After that time, it begins to disintegrate. However, sperm can live and fertilize an egg up to three days after ejaculation.

Monitoring Ovulation

- The basal temperature method requires that you take your temperature every day at the same time. By keeping track of your daily temperature changes, you can tell when your body is ovulating. Your temperature rises during ovulation.
- Cervical mucus monitoring requires checking vaginal mucus secretions daily. As the body prepares for ovulation, the amount of mucus present increases and becomes more elastic.
- Home ovulation predictors can be purchased without a prescription to help you accurately predict when you ovulate.

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- If you're having difficulty pinpointing your ovulation, there's a chance you're not ovulating at all. Your doctor can help you determine this and possibly give you drugs to stimulate ovulation.
- If you're over 35 years old and you've been unable to conceive after six months of unprotected sex, your doctor may want to monitor your efforts or begin testing. As women age, their eggs are fewer and less fertile.
- Women under age 35 who have not become pregnant after one year of unprotected sex may want to see a doctor.



Choosing a Doctor

- **medical doctor**—completed four years of medical school and served a general residency
- **obstetrician/gynecologist (OB-gyn)**—completed a residency in the specialty field of obstetrics and gynecology
- **board certified in obstetrics/gynecology**—passed written and oral exams in addition to completing residency
- **board certified in reproductive endocrinology**—completed a two- to three-year fellowship in reproductive endocrinology and passed written and oral exams
- **board certified in andrology**—(most qualified for treating male infertility) completed a residency in urology and a two-year fellowship in andrology; passed a written and oral exam in andrology

The Female Exam

- Blood tests can check hormone levels and functioning of the thyroid gland to determine if ovulation is occurring.
- A pelvic exam will be performed to make sure the uterus and fallopian tubes are normal.
- Your doctor may want to try a postcoital test, which is performed within an hour after intercourse to make sure the sperm can live in the cervical mucus.
- An ultrasound may be performed to see if any growths or obstructions are present in the reproductive organs.

The Male Exam

- A physical exam will check for swelling in the prostate, for obstructions in the reproductive duct and for varicocele, which is a tangle of veins in the scrotum. If the veins are too large and create excessive heat, it can affect fertility.
- Hormone balances are checked with a blood test.
- Semen analysis can be done to determine the number of sperm, their activity and if there are any malformations.