

FACTSHEET

MALE FERTILITY PROBLEMS- THE EFFECTS OF LIFESTYLE

It is sometimes assumed that most fertility problems are down to women, but in fact for around a third to a half of all cases of infertility, the difficulty conceiving will be related to issues with the male partner. Male fertility problems are most often to do with the number or quality of sperm or with problems in the tubes which carry the sperm. Sometimes the number of sperm may be lower than usual (that's the sperm count) or the shape or structure of the sperm may be a problem (sperm morphology) or they may not be able to swim about normally (sperm motility). Any of these can lead to difficulty conceiving.

Your sperm count is linked to the size of your testicles and men with larger testicles tend to be more fertile than men with smaller testicles. This isn't something you can change and it is important to be clear that although lifestyle has an impact on male fertility problems, changing your habits can't increase your sperm production. What you can do is avoid the risks which may have a negative impact on sperm.

Tight underwear

Research has shown that men who wear boxer shorts tend to have better sperm than men who wear tight pants. It is worth opting for loose underwear if you are trying to conceive. It is thought that wearing tight pants can cause the testicles and scrotum to get too hot and heat can damage sperm. The good news is that the impact of tight underwear can be reversed if you change what you wear.

Heat

The impact of heat from tight underwear on sperm can also be reflected in heat from other sources. Men whose work involves sitting still for long periods, like drivers, or those who work near heat sources, like chefs or steel workers, may find that this affects their sperm. Getting up and walking about can help if your job involves a lot of sitting still, and making sure you have some time away from the heat source will help those whose work involves exposure to high temperatures.

Smoking

It can damage your sperm DNA if you are a smoker and although you may have the same number of sperm as a non-smoker, the sperm will be less healthy. Passive smoking can also affect your partner's fertility, so it is important to give up if you are trying to conceive. Giving up smoking will also have an impact on your general health and well-being.

Drinking

Men who are trying to conceive unsuccessfully are often told that they should think about giving up alcohol altogether but in fact there is no scientific evidence to back up the theory that moderate alcohol consumption is going to ruin your fertility. What may have an impact on male fertility is binge drinking, and it is not a good idea to save up all your weekly units for Friday nights.

Anabolic steroids

One thing which definitely does have a very clear impact on your sperm is anabolic steroids which some men take to make their bodies more muscular. They can have very serious effects on sperm and sperm production may even stop altogether. It can take years to reverse the impact of anabolic steroids and sometimes this may never happen. It is essential to stop taking steroids if you are trying to conceive.

Nutrition

There are studies which show that a healthy diet rich in vitamins and minerals can make a difference to sperm production, but there is no general agreement on which vitamins and minerals make a difference. If you want to take a supplement, you may want to consider a multi-vitamin but ensuring that you eat a properly balanced diet is probably the most important thing you can do.

Your age

It isn't really a lifestyle issue as you can't change your age, but there is growing evidence that there is an age-related decline in male fertility as there is for women. It isn't as marked as the female biological clock but there is a decline in sperm quality as men get older which is apparent by the time they are in their forties. It is thought that this may make miscarriage more likely.

Although there are things which can have a negative impact on sperm production, couples who are trying to conceive are usually very aware of the importance of trying to lead a healthy lifestyle. If you are not smoking, are eating well and not binge drinking, the chances are that your sperm are unlikely to be impacted by your lifestyle.

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