

Your future fertility

www.fertilitynetworkuk.org

Email: info@fertilitynetworkscotland.org

Tel: 01294 279162



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Although starting a family in the future is unlikely to be your priority at the moment, it is important to be properly informed about your fertility. Lifestyle choices that you make now can have an impact not only on your overall health, but also on your future fertility. If you are aware of this, you may want to consider lifestyle changes which could help to protect your fertility for the future.



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Fertility Network UK Head Office

Charter House, 43 St. Leonards Road, Bexhill on sea, East Sussex TN40 1JA.

Email: info@fertilitynetworkuk.org

Info Line: 01424 732361

Sexually transmitted infections

Sexually transmitted infections can have a lasting impact on your chances of having a family in the future. Chlamydia is extremely common and it is estimated that around 10% of young people who are sexually active may have the infection. There are often no symptoms, but it can have an irreversible effect on your fertility. Both chlamydia and gonorrhoea can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, which is a major cause of infertility. Using condoms will help to protect you from sexually transmitted infections.

Weight

Weight problems can affect your fertility if you are very overweight or underweight. Obesity is linked to ovulation problems for women and with lower sperm counts for men. Being very underweight is not good for your fertility either; women need some body fat in order to produce eggs normally.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders can lead to fertility problems. Women who are anorexic often find that their periods stop, and this can have a lasting impact even if a woman is able to maintain a normal weight in the future. Bulimia is linked with polycystic ovary syndrome, a condition which affects the way women's ovaries work.

Anabolic steroids

Anabolic steroids, which men sometimes take to improve their performance in sports and boost muscle, may lead to serious fertility problems. They can cause the testicles to shut down completely, and the effects are not always reversible.

Recreational drugs

Recreational drugs, even those which you may think are not particularly harmful such as cannabis, may have an impact on both male and female fertility.

Smoking

Smoking is known to be detrimental to fertility. Women who smoke are twice as likely to have fertility problems as those who don't and also often have a shorter reproductive life as they tend to have an earlier menopause.

Excess or binge drinking

Excess or binge drinking can make it harder to conceive for both men and women, affecting sperm and egg production.

Age

Your age is a key factor in your fertility. Both male and female fertility decline with age, but for women this is particularly acute; by the time a woman reaches the age of 35 her fertility goes into a fairly sharp decline. Fertility treatment cannot reverse the biological clock and is less effective in older women.

Although you may feel now that starting a family is something you won't want to consider for some years ahead, being aware of the lifestyle factors that may have an impact on your future is important. Making sure that you keep fit and healthy will not only help to protect your fertility for the future, but will also improve your happiness and well-being now.