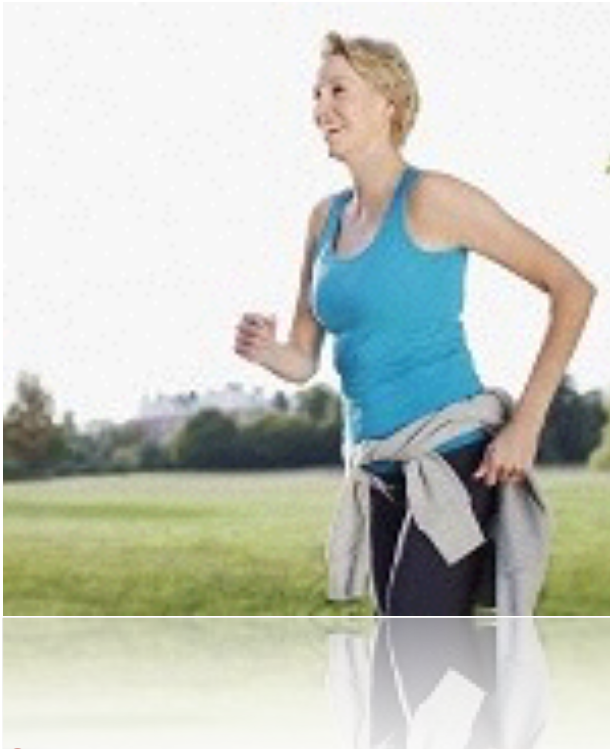


Preparing for Pregnancy

Lifestyle and Preconception Health



One of the first questions you may ask yourself when deciding to start a family is what lifestyle changes you should make to give yourself the best chance of conceiving.

There are many factors that contribute to natural conception. Lifestyle is important although there are biological factors beyond your control such as age, that may impact your fertility, as well as the amount of time it takes to conceive.

By leading a healthy lifestyle, understanding your menstrual cycle and seeing your doctor for a fertility assessment, you will increase your chance of pregnancy.

Fertility Assessment

Once you've made the decision to start a family, visit your GP for a pre-pregnancy check-up. This will include blood tests such as rubella (German measles) and varicella (chicken pox); your blood group, antibodies and Rh factor, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C, HIV, syphilis and a full blood count. Your GP can confirm that you are ovulating through a combination of tests, including a

blood test which measures your hormone levels and an ultrasound examination.

Ensure you have had a normal pap smear and breast check within the past two years.

If you are taking any medications or are aware of any history of genetic disorders in your family, discuss these with your doctor.

Understanding your menstrual cycle

The reproductive cycle of a woman generally runs through three phases which are controlled by hormonal feedback mechanisms in the hypothalamus and pituitary gland of the brain. Your cycle could become irregular or cease if the hormonal balance or production is disturbed for any reason.

The key to conceiving is knowing your fertile time. The simplest way to work out when you ovulate is to subtract 14 days from the number of days in your cycle. For example, if there are 28 days from the start of your period to the start of the next period, you can expect to ovulate on day 14. You should aim to have intercourse about 2 days before ovulation and on the day of ovulation. This ensures that sperm are present in the fallopian tubes at the time the egg is released from the ovary.

Lifestyle

Diet

Maintain a balanced diet. Foods rich in calcium, iron and folate, such as dairy foods, fruit and vegetables, cereals, wholegrain breads, beans and lentils are vital. A general multivitamin may be recommended and folic acid is essential for three months before you become pregnant and during pregnancy to lower the risk of neural tube defects.

Weight

A normal body mass index (BMI) of between 20 and 30 is ideal for a woman trying to conceive. Being decidedly overweight or underweight makes regular ovulation less likely, if you have a high BMI. Both females and males can improve their fertility dramatically with just a 5% reduction in weight.

Exercise

Moderate exercise such as walking, swimming or cycling all contribute to your general well-being and exercise lowers the risk of problems during pregnancy and birth. Excessive exercise may decrease your fertility, so regular moderate exercise for an average of 30 minutes, three times a week, is best.

Smoking

Smoking has been shown to disrupt regular ovulation in women and increase the risk of miscarriage and premature birth. Some studies suggest that a child born to a male smoker may be at an increased risk of developing cancer in childhood. There is no level of smoking that is risk free. If you smoke, quit!

Alcohol

Limit alcohol in-take. Alcohol can lead to a lower birth weight in babies and has a negative effect on the baby's brain development. Heavy alcohol consumption in men is known to affect sperm production, while studies indicate that heavy drinking by women during pregnancy can have a permanent effect on foetal development. There is currently no agreed safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Caffeine

Minimise your caffeine (such as coffee, chocolate, colas). High caffeine in-take has been linked to a slightly increased risk of miscarriage and low birth weight. Prior to conception it is recommended that both men and women should aim for less than 200mg of caffeine a day.

Recreational drugs

These drugs can affect sperm quality, cause a wide variety of problems during pregnancy and affect newborn babies. Recreational drugs of any kind should be avoided.

Stress

While it is easier said than done, reducing the stress in your life can help. While normal to low levels of stress possibly have little impact on your fertility; high levels of stress for long periods of time can be unhealthy and it may be best to seek advice from your medical practitioner.

Tips to reduce stress:

Meditate, eat well, and maintain regular exercise.

General Pre-pregnancy Planning Checklist

- Visit your GP
 - Check for infectious diseases
 - Full blood count
 - Blood group
 - Antibodies
 - Perform a pap smear and breast check
 - Discuss any health concerns, including any medication you may be taking
- Dentistry check up
 - Ensure x-rays and fillings are done before pregnancy
- Enjoy a balanced diet
 - Take your daily folic acid
- Check your BMI
- Enjoy regular, moderate exercise
- Minimise your stress levels
- Stop smoking and never take recreational drugs
- Limit alcohol and caffeine consumption.
- Enjoy Life!

For more information

Rotunda IVF can provide you with general information by phone or through our website. Should you wish to make an appointment to talk to one of our fertility specialists, please call in, contact us by phone or send us an email.

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Sun By appointment only