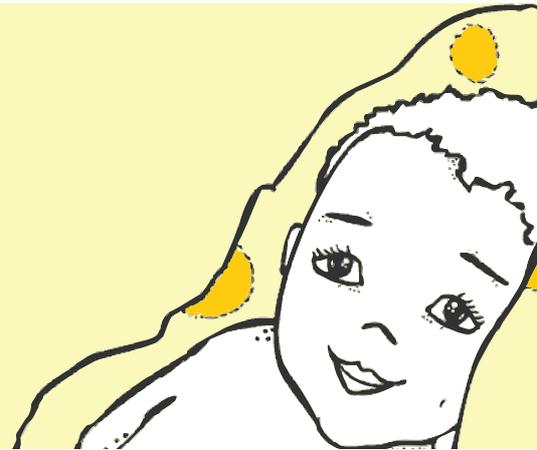


Get ready to get pregnant.

Time to talk to your doctor.



Whether you're a woman or a man, if you're thinking about having a baby you should see your doctor for a preconception health check. Use this information to have a conversation with your doctor to optimise your chance of conceiving and having a healthy baby.

You can also fill in and print the *Get baby-ready* questionnaire at www.yourfertility.org.au to take to your doctor.

The Top 5 Fertility Factors



Age



Weight



Smoking



Alcohol



Timing of sex

Age

Fertility declines with age, so if you're in a position to have a baby, consider your age and that of your partner in deciding when. As a general rule, women's fertility starts to decline in their early thirties and declines more rapidly after age 35. Men's fertility starts to decline at about age 45.

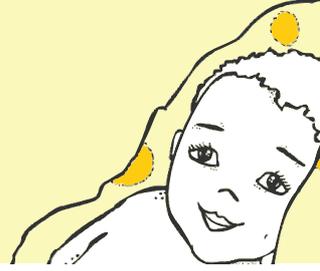
If you're over 35 and have tried to get pregnant for six months or more, see a fertility specialist. If you're under 35 and have tried to get pregnant for a year or more, you may need to see a fertility specialist.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle factors influence the chance of getting pregnant and having a healthy baby. Being overweight, smoking, and consuming large quantities of alcohol or caffeinated drinks reduce female and male fertility.

A healthy diet together with regular exercise can help reduce weight and maintain weight in the healthy range.

Your doctor can point you in the right direction for advice if you want to lose weight or stop smoking. For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.



General health

Some medical conditions and medications can affect women's and men's fertility and the health of a growing baby. Tell your doctor if you have any medical conditions or are taking any medication including herbal or alternative medicines.

Use of recreational drugs and anabolic steroids can affect fertility and pregnancy outcomes. When trying for a baby, it is safest to not use drugs.

To reduce the risk of birth defects, women should take folic acid tablets for at least two months before conceiving and in the first three months of pregnancy.

German measles (Rubella) in pregnancy can cause severe birth defects. Your doctor will order a test to make sure you're immune to Rubella and if you're not, you should be vaccinated before you conceive.

You should tell your doctor if you have been exposed to pesticides, heavy metals, toxic chemicals or radiation, all of which can affect fertility.

Reproductive health

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) should be treated before pregnancy. Some STIs – particularly chlamydia and gonorrhoea – can affect fertility if left untreated.

For women, you may need to see a fertility specialist if you have irregular periods, or have had difficulty conceiving in the past, experienced a miscarriage, or been diagnosed with a fertility problem.

For men, if you have had surgery on the genitals as a child or an adult, or if you have had mumps as an adolescent or an adult, this may affect your fertility and should be discussed with your doctor.

Timing of sex

The fertile window is the time in a woman's menstrual cycle when conception is possible. Pregnancy is technically possible during the week before ovulation and the day of ovulation. The likelihood of actually becoming pregnant, though, is dramatically increased if you have intercourse in the three days leading up to and including the day of ovulation. So from the start of one period to the start of the next period, the fertile window is these three days.

For women with regular cycles, this is how you work out the fertile window:

- Work out the average length of the menstrual cycle. Day one is the first day of the period and the last day is the day before the next period begins.
- The day of ovulation is about two weeks before the next expected period. The fertile window starts two days before ovulation.
- So, in a 28 day cycle, ovulation happens around day 14 and the fertile window starts around day 12. If cycles are longer – for example, 35 days between periods – ovulation happens around day 21 and the fertile window starts around day 19. If cycles are short, say 21 days, ovulation happens around day seven and the fertile window would start around day five.
- The Your Fertility website has an ovulation calculator: www.yourfertility.org.au
- Some commercially available ovulation kits can help pinpoint ovulation.

For women with irregular cycles it's more difficult to know when ovulation happens. Your doctor can order blood tests to check if you're ovulating. If tests show that ovulation doesn't happen on a regular basis, medication to trigger ovulation might be needed.

To get timing of intercourse right it's also important to pay attention to changes in the vaginal discharge (cervical mucus) that happen during the menstrual cycle. Non-fertile mucus is usually quite sparse and thick or pasty. A few days before ovulation, the amount of cervical mucus increases and it changes appearance. Fertile mucus is clear, stretchy, and slippery – perfect for sperm to swim along.

Questions you want to ask your doctor
