

Planning for Pregnancy

It is important to first learn all you can about increasing your chances of conception and becoming pregnant. Get educated on the facts, and talk to your doctor about recommended conception techniques and the right methods for determining fertility and pregnancy.

Increasing Your Chances

If you want to increase your chances of becoming pregnant, try these suggestions:

- **Discontinue all forms of birth control:** Experts say that once you stop taking birth control pills, it may take a few months until you are able to conceive. If you use either Depo-Provera or Norplant, you may have to discontinue use three to six months before you plan on becoming pregnant. If you are using an IUD, it will need to be removed before you can become pregnant. Talk to your doctor before you stop using birth control.
- **Get to know the time of the month when you are most fertile:** Ask your doctor for a special calendar chart that will help you keep track of your cycles. Your cycle chart should record exactly when your period stops and starts. Keep in mind that your chart will not be accurate until you have discontinued all forms of hormonal birth control for at least three months. For help in determining ovulation, consider buying an ovulation prediction kit, which tests your urine for a special hormone.
- In addition to charting your cycles, watch for the three main signs of fertility, which are:
 - **Basal body temperature:** Your temperature generally falls about a day before your egg is released and increases between 0.4 to 0.8 degrees Fahrenheit after the egg is released, staying higher until your period starts again. You are considered fertile until your temperature has remained high for three consecutive days. Ask your doctor for tips on how to take your temperature.
 - **Amount of cervical fluid:** Vaginal mucus fluid, which helps sperm swim easier, will vary during your cycle. A woman typically ovulates on the day when the most mucus is present, which is the same time that her basal body temperature drops. When the mucus appears sticky, thin and elastic, it is an indication that you are fertile, at least until the fourth day after peak mucus. Ask your doctor for more detailed tips on checking your mucus.
 - **Cervix position:** When you are fertile, the cervix (the opening to the uterus) is softer, and the vaginal area may feel full and engorged. When you are not fertile, the cervix feels harder.
- **Have intercourse every 36 to 48 hours from day nine to day 18 after your last period.** Following this schedule allows the sperm count to increase, boosting your chances of conception.
- **Men should refrain from sex for at least a day or two before trying to conceive.** The number of sperm increases (for up to seven days) if a man does not ejaculate for more than a day.

Factors to Consider in Conception

There are several factors that need to be considered when planning for conception. Learn all you can about ovulation and fertility, and become familiar with the terminology:

- A typical menstrual cycle is 28 days, but some women cycle in as short as 21 days and as long as 40 days. The first day of a period is day one of the cycle. The eggs begin to ripen in follicles within the

ovaries over the first 13 days of the cycle. Up to 30 follicles begin to grow, although only one egg is usually released, which occurs on about day 14. On average, ovulation occurs 14 days before the next menstrual cycle begins. If you do not become pregnant, your menstrual cycle should begin 14 days later, or after day 28.

- The time immediately before ovulation is when a woman is most fertile: The best window of opportunity is three days before and for up to two days after ovulation - or nine to 18 days following the first day of your period.
- The egg has a 24-hour window in which it can be fertilized. But because sperm live for three days, on average, and because sperm can fertilize the egg for 24 to 48 hours after ejaculation, you actually have a three-day window in which to become pregnant.
- Women are at their peak of fertility in their mid-20s. Men are at their peak fertility in their teens. After these ages, fertility gradually declines. For instance, a man's chance of impregnating a woman at age 40 is 70 percent less than that of his ability at age 25.

Of all couples attempting to become pregnant:

- Roughly half do so in three to five months.
- One out of four do so in six months.
- Five to 10 percent do so in one year.
- Up to 15 percent will encounter fertility problems that may keep them from becoming pregnant for more than a year.

If it takes more than a year to get pregnant, or longer than six months if the woman is older than 35, the couple is technically considered to have a fertility problem.

If you have failed to conceive for longer than a year, talk to your doctor about your options.

Determining Pregnancy

The most common method of determining pregnancy is a home pregnancy test kit. These kits, available over the counter, are 95 to 100 percent accurate.

They measure the level of hCG (human chorionic gonadotropin, which enters the blood within eight to 10 days following conception) in the urine.

The test is best taken on the morning of the first day after the day you expect your period. However, if you test too early, you could get a false negative result indicating that you are not pregnant when you actually are. Or you may get a false positive result, which is not as common.

To confirm test results, repeat the home pregnancy test, and schedule a visit with your doctor, who can perform a blood test to definitively validate the findings.

Resources

- U.S. National Library of Medicine: www.nlm.nih.gov
- American College of Nurse-Midwives: www.midwife.org
- WomensHealth.gov: www.womenshealth.gov
- The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: www.acog.org

Here when you need us.

Call: 877-314-5841

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: TARHEELS

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