Back to Reproductive system - female

Age and fertility

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Age affects the fertility of both men and women. Age is the single biggest factor affecting a woman’s chance to conceive and have a healthy baby. A woman’s fertility starts to decline in her early 30s, with the decline speeding up after 35. Male fertility decline is more subtle, but a man’s age affect the chances of his (female) partner conceiving, and increases the risk of miscarriage, and the child’s risk of mental health and developmental disorders.

Women’s age and fertility

A woman is born with all the eggs she is going to have in her lifetime. Her eggs age with her, decreasing in quality and quantity. This is why age is the single most important factor affecting a woman’s fertility. While good health improves the chance of getting pregnant and having a healthy baby, it does not override the effects of age on a woman’s fertility.

In her early to mid-20s, a woman has a 25 to 30 per cent chance of getting pregnant every month. Female fertility generally starts to decline when a woman is in her early 30s, and the decline speeds up after the age of 35. By age 40, the chance of getting pregnant in any monthly cycle is down to around five per cent.

It is a common misconception that IVF treatment can overcome age-related infertility. A woman’s age also affects the chance of success with IVF. The chance of a live birth resulting from one IVF cycle for women of different ages in 2014 in Australia and New Zealand is illustrated.
For older women the chance of having a baby increases if they use eggs donated by a younger woman.

The risk of pregnancy complications increases with age too. The risk of miscarriage and chromosomal abnormalities in the fetus increase significantly from age 35. Complications such as gestational diabetes, placenta previa (when the placenta covers all or part of the cervix, which increases the risk that the placenta will detach), caesarean section, and still birth are also more common among older than younger women.

**Men’s age and fertility**

While the effects of female age on fertility have been known for a long time, more recent studies have found that the age of the male partner also affects the chance of pregnancy and pregnancy health.

Male fertility generally starts to decline around age 40–45 years when sperm quality decreases. Increasing male age reduces the overall chances of pregnancy and increases time to pregnancy (the number of menstrual cycles it takes to become pregnant) and the risk of miscarriage and fetal death.

Children of older fathers also have an increased risk of mental health problems (although this is still rare). Children of fathers aged 40 or over are five times more likely to develop an autism spectrum disorder than children of fathers aged 30 or less. They also have a slightly increased risk of developing schizophrenia and other mental health disorders later in life.

**References**

Female reproductive system explained

Androgen deficiency in women
- Androgen deficiency in women and its treatment is controversial, and more research is needed.

DES daughters
- If your mother took DES while she was pregnant with you, then you are a DES daughter or DES son.

Health checks for women
A woman at high risk of a particular disease should be checked more frequently and/or at an earlier age...

- Pelvic floor
  Pelvic floor exercises are designed to improve muscle tone and prevent the need for corrective surgery...

- Pregnancy stages and changes
  It’s helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings...

- Puberty
  Adjusting to the many changes that happen around puberty can be difficult for both parents and young people...

- Reproductive system
  New life begins when a male sex cell (sperm) fertilises a female egg (ovum) within the female reproductive system...

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
  It is not difficult to avoid catching sexually transmitted infections (STIs)...

- Transvaginal mesh
  Transvaginal mesh has been used for more than 20 years to manage problems for women such as prolapse and incontinence. While this treatment is successful for many women, some unfortunately have...

Menstruation and ovulation

- Menstrual cycle
  The menstrual cycle is complex and is controlled by many different glands and the hormones that these glands produce...

- Menstruation - abnormal bleeding
  Heavy or abnormal periods may be an indication of other health problems...

- Menstruation – amenorrhoea
  Some women are more at risk of amenorrhoea (the absence of periods) because of emotional stress or changes in weight...

- Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea
  Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods...

- Menstruation - pain (dysmenorrhoea)
  Women of any age can experience painful periods and some women find periods are no longer painful after pregnancy and childbirth...

- Ovulation
  The female body shows several signs of ovulation and you may experience some or all of these signs...

- Ovulation pain
  Ovulation pain is usually harmless, but can sometimes indicate various medical conditions such as endometriosis...

- Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)
  Most menstruating women have some form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS)...

- Toxic shock syndrome (TSS)
  If you think you could have toxic shock syndrome, stop using tampons immediately and go to the emergency department of your nearest hospital...

Menopause

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and menopause
  Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can reduce menopausal symptoms, but the benefits and risks need to be considered carefully...

- Menopause
  Menopause is a natural occurrence and marks the end of a woman's reproductive years...

- Menopause and complementary therapies
  The use of complementary therapies to manage menopausal symptoms is popular, but the sources of information available to consumers are of variable quality and reliability...
Menopause and osteoporosis

Regular weight-bearing exercise and maintaining a diet rich in calcium from childhood will help reduce bone loss at menopause.

Menopause and sexual issues

Menopause, the final menstrual period, is a natural event that marks the end of a woman's reproductive years.

Menopause and weight gain

Weight gain at menopause can be managed using healthy eating and exercise; HRT may also be beneficial.

Premature and early menopause

The symptoms of premature or early menopause are the same as for menopause at any age.

Fertility, pregnancy and childbirth

Abortion

All women should have access to accurate information about abortion so they can make their own informed decisions.

About pregnancy and birth services in Victoria (video)

Victoria’s pregnancy, birth and maternal services, help from planning a pregnancy through to giving birth and caring for a newborn.

Age and fertility

Age affects the fertility of both men and women, and is the single biggest factor affecting a woman’s chance to conceive and have a healthy baby.

Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI

IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

Contraception after an abortion

Whether you have a surgical or medical abortion you can become fertile again very soon after the abortion, so it’s important to start using contraception immediately if you wish to prevent any...

Contraception - choices

The method of contraception you choose will depend on your general health, lifestyle and relationships.

Ectopic pregnancy

Ectopic pregnancy is caused by a fertilised egg not being able to move through the fallopian tube.

Endometriosis - know the facts (video)

Learn some facts about endometriosis. We debunk some myths and explore symptoms, diagnosis and treatment options for women.

Infertility in women

The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation are approximately one in five every month.

Miscarriage

A range of feelings is normal after a miscarriage, and they often linger for some time.

Molar pregnancy

Most molar pregnancies are diagnosed when bleeding early in pregnancy prompts an ultrasound scan.

Placental abruption

Placental abruption means the placenta has detached from the wall of the uterus, starving the baby of oxygen and nutrients.

Placenta previa

Placenta previa means the placenta has implanted at the bottom of the uterus, over the cervix or close by.

Pregnancy - obstetric emergencies

An obstetric emergency may arise when a woman is pregnant, or during her delivery. In this case, extra care is needed. A woman may need a lot of tests and treatments, and extended hospital stays. She...

Pregnancy - pre-eclampsia

There is no evidence that pre-eclampsia is caused by emotional stress, working too hard or not getting enough rest.

Pregnancy stages and changes
It’s helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings.

- **Pregnancy testing**
  Sometimes, a home pregnancy test may be positive when a woman isn’t pregnant.

- **Twins - identical and fraternal**
  Multiple births are more common due to the advancing average age of mothers and the rise in assisted reproductive techniques.

- **Weight, fertility and pregnancy health**
  Compared with women in the healthy weight range, women who are carrying extra weight are less likely to conceive.

**Breast**

- **Breast awareness**
  Women should become familiar with the normal look, feel and shape of their breasts, so they will notice any abnormal changes.

- **Breast cancer**
  Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women.

- **Breast cancer and oestrogen**
  There are different types of breast cancer, and around 70 per cent are sensitive to the female sex hormone oestrogen.

- **Breast conditions other than breast cancer**
  The vast majority of breast changes are not breast cancer, but you should always see your doctor if you notice changes in your breasts.

- **Breastfeeding**
  Breastfeeding positioning and attachment come naturally to some babies and mothers, but many need time and practice to get it right.

- **Breast implants and mammograms**
  Most women who have breast implants will be able to have regular screening mammograms.

- **Breast implants and your health**
  Complications can occur with all types of breast implants, but recent improvements have made breast implants safer.

- **Breast implants (augmentation)**
  Breast implants are inserted under the skin to create larger breasts.

- **Breast reduction for women**
  Breast reduction surgery removes excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a breast size in proportion with your body.

**Fallopian tubes and ovaries**

- **Ectopic pregnancy**
  Ectopic pregnancy is caused by a fertilised egg not being able to move through the fallopian tube.

- **Endometriosis - know the facts (video)**
  Learn some facts about endometriosis. We debunk some myths and explore symptoms, diagnosis and treatment options for women.

- **Fallopian tube cancer**
  Fallopian tube cancer is one of the rarest gynaecological cancers.

- **Ovarian cancer**
  Many women with early stage ovarian cancer may not have any symptoms.

- **Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)**
  Polycystic ovarian syndrome is a hormonal condition associated with irregular menstrual cycles, excess hair growth, acne, reduced fertility, and increased risk of diabetes and mood changes.

- **Pregnancy - obstetric emergencies**
  An obstetric emergency may arise when a woman is pregnant, or during her delivery. In this case, extra care is needed. A woman may need a lot of tests and treatments, and extended hospital stays. She...
**Pregnancy stages and changes**

It’s helpful to have an idea of how your body may react to the different stages of pregnancy. It also helps to know how pregnancy may affect your emotions and feelings.

**Salpingitis**

Salpingitis is one of the most common causes of female infertility and may permanently damage the fallopian tubes.

**Uterus and cervix**

- **Cervical cancer**
  
  All women aged between 25 and 74 are advised to have Cervical Screening Tests every 5 years, new tests help identify HPV or cervical cancer.

- **Cervical screening tests**
  
  The cervical screening test protects up to 30 per cent more women than the Pap test.

- **Contraception - vaginal ring**
  
  The vaginal ring works in a similar way to the oral contraceptive pill to prevent pregnancy.

- **Endometriosis**
  
  Endometriosis is a painful condition that may be treated with medications or surgery.

- **Endometriosis - know the facts (video)**
  
  Learn some facts about endometriosis. We debunk some myths and explore symptoms, diagnosis and treatment options for women.

- **Fibroids**
  
  Often, fibroids do not cause any problems, but they are occasionally associated with infertility, miscarriage and premature labour.

- **Prolapsed uterus**
  
  The pelvic floor and associated supporting ligaments can be weakened or damaged in many ways, causing uterine prolapse.

- **Retroverted uterus**
  
  Painful sex may be caused by a retroverted uterus.

- **Uterine cancer**
  
  Uterine cancer is one of the most common gynaecological cancers.

- **Uterine inversion**
  
  Uterine inversion means the placenta fails to detach from the uterine wall, and pulls the uterus inside-out as it exits.

**Pelvis, vagina and vulva**

- **Bacterial vaginosis**
  
  Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is caused by an imbalance of the bacteria normally present in the vagina.

- **Bladder prolapse**
  
  Bladder prolapse is when the bladder bulges into the vagina.

- **Cosmetic genital surgery - labiaplasty and phalloplasty**
  
  Cosmetic genital surgery involves reshaping the labia, vulva or penis to alter their size or shape.

- **Cysts**
  
  Cysts may be as small as a blister or large enough to hold litres of fluid.

- **Female genital cutting or circumcision (FGC)**
  
  Female genital cutting or circumcision (FGC) involves the cutting or altering of the external female genital organs.

- **Labial adhesions**
  
  Labial adhesions are more common during the nappy years, but poor hygiene may be a cause in older girls.

- **Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)**
  
  Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) occurs when an infection spreads from the vagina to the cervix and fallopian tubes.

- **Rectocele**

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Age and fertility
A rectocele is when the rectum protrudes into the vagina.

- Vaginal bleeding - irregular
  If you suffer from ongoing vaginal bleeding problems, see your doctor.

- Vaginal cancer
  Some vaginal cancers have no symptoms in their early stages, and only cause symptoms once they have invaded other parts of the body.

Reproductive and contraception

- Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI
  IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

- Caesarean section
  A caesarean section is usually performed when it is safer for the mother or the baby than a vaginal birth.

- Contraception - tubal ligation
  Sterilisation is a permanent method of contraception that a woman can choose if she is sure that she does not want children in the future.

- Dilatation and curettage (D&C)
  A dilatation and curettage (D&C) is an operation performed on women to lightly scrape away the womb lining.

- Endometriosis - know the facts (video)
  Learn some facts about endometriosis. We debunk some myths and explore symptoms, diagnosis and treatment options for women.

- Hysterectomy
  The conditions that prompt a hysterectomy can often be treated by other means, and hysterectomy should only be a last resort.

Related Information

- Weight, fertility and pregnancy health
  Compared with women in the healthy weight range, women who are carrying extra weight are less likely to conceive.

- Infertility in women
  The odds of a young fertile couple conceiving by having sexual intercourse around the time of ovulation are approximately one in five every month.

- Assisted reproductive technology – IVF and ICSI
  IVF (in-vitro-fertilization) and ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) are assisted reproductive treatment (ART) procedures in which fertilisation of an egg occurs outside the body.

- Infertility in men
  A couple isn't suspected of fertility problems until they have tried and failed to conceive for one year.

- Ovulation
  The female body shows several signs of ovulation and you may experience some or all of these signs.

Related information on other websites

- Andrology Australia
- Jean Hailes for Women’s Health
- Your Fertility.

Content Partner

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