

# The Couple's Guide To Getting Pregnant



Dr. Fertility

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We spend most of our adult life trying to avoid getting pregnant, but when the time comes for us to start our family, we are often surprised when it doesn't happen as quickly as we had hoped. Some women will get pregnant straight away, whilst for others it can take longer. This can be frustrating but it is normal for it to take up to a year to get pregnant. According to the NHS, only 20% of couples will fall pregnant after one month, 70% after 6 months and 85% within a year.

While it is impossible to entirely control the process, the good news is that if you're trying to shorten your path to parenthood (especially if you are a slightly more mature couple), there are lots of things that you can both do to improve your chances of conceiving.

We have developed a [5 step guide](#) to help you to get started straight away, along with a Trying to Conceive (TTC) action plan.

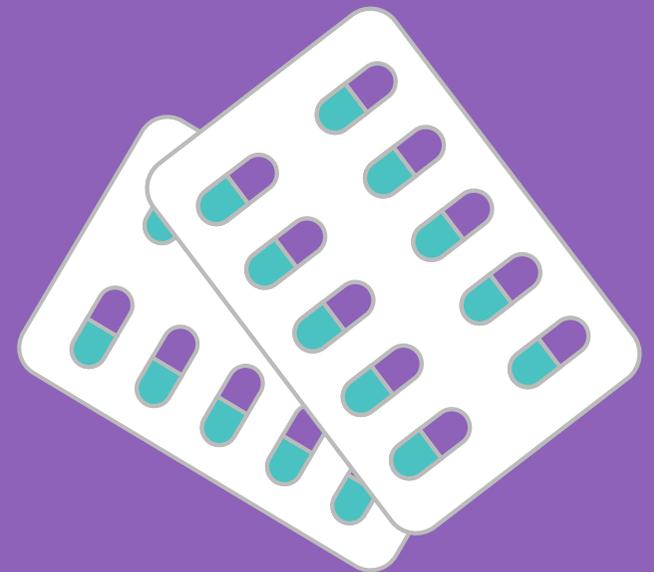
Wishing you lots of luck on your fertility journey!

Love,

Kobi & Lucy

xxx

# **Step 1: Prepare your bodies**



## Step 1: Prepare your bodies

Preparing your bodies is a great place for you both to start when TTC. To maximise your chances of conception and of a healthy pregnancy, ideally you want to start thinking about preparing your body three to six months before TTC.

Women are born with all the eggs that they will ever have and there is nothing you can do to change this, but by looking after your body you can affect the quality of your eggs. It takes three to six months for an egg to mature and be ready for ovulation.

For men, it's important to understand that sperm production takes approximately three months. Therefore, positive lifestyle changes need to be made several months before TTC. Making changes to your lifestyle on Saturday will not ensure super sperm by the following Monday.

### Diet & fitness

**For her:** It is important to maintain a healthy weight, especially when you are TTC and during pregnancy. A healthy weight means having a body mass index (BMI) of between 18.5 and 24.9. Being underweight (BMI less than 18.5) or overweight (BMI is 30 or above) can affect your chances of getting pregnant or mean it can take longer for you to get pregnant. Measuring your waist circumference is also a good way to check you are not carrying too much fat around your stomach, even if you have a healthy BMI. For women having a waist circumference of less than 80 cm is considered to be healthy.

**For him:** Having a BMI greater than 30 or a poor diet can have an impact on your fertility too. Men should also aim to have a waist circumference of less than 94 cm.

**Action for both:** You don't need to go on a special diet but it is important to eat a balanced diet and increase your intake of fruit and vegetables. Aim to eat at least 5 portions a day, which will increase the intake of the nutrients that your body needs. Cut down on sugar, refined carbohydrates and saturated fats too. Exercise can be a fun activity to do together and is a great way to reduce body fat and increase your sex drive! Keeping fit also helps women to handle the strain that pregnancy puts on their body. If you are a vegan we would recommend talking to your doctor when TTC to ensure you are getting enough nutrients. You can calculate your BMI and waist circumference [here](#).

## **Vitamins & food supplements**

**For her:** All women are advised to take folic acid tablets when TTC to build up the level of folic acid in their body. This will give the baby maximum protection against neural tube defects such as spina bifida, where parts of your baby's brain or spinal cord are not formed properly. Even if you have a very healthy diet it is very difficult to get the amount of folic acid you need from diet alone.

The UK Department of Health recommends that women TTC should take 400 micrograms of folic acid (vitamin B9) a day whilst TTC and for the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. It is a good idea to start taking your folic acid 2-3 months before TTC if possible. Having the right level of folic acid in your body when you conceive can reduce the risk of your baby developing a neural tube defect by 70%.

Some women have an increased risk of having a pregnancy affected by a neural tube defect which means you might need to take a larger dose of folic acid (5 mg a day). You may have an increased risk if:

- You or your partner have a neural tube defect
- You have previously had a pregnancy with a neural tube defect
- There is a family history of neural tube defects

- You are overweight
- You are taking medication for epilepsy
- You have diabetes

If you think you need a higher dose talk to your doctor who can advise you and write you a prescription if necessary, because 5mg tablets folic acid are not available without a prescription.

**Action:** A folic acid supplement can be taken as either:

- A single 400 microgram folic acid supplement
- Folic acid 400 microgram as part of a multivitamin

***Warning:** Pregnant women should avoid supplements and multivitamins containing vitamin A (also known as retinol) because too much vitamin A can harm your baby's development. Always check the label.*

**For him:** The recommendation for the boys is not as clear cut as for the girls. There are a range of vitamins and supplements on the market designed for men who are TTC, many containing ingredients that act as antioxidants. Currently, there is no medical consensus regarding the optimal type, dose or duration you should take these antioxidants.

**Action:** If you do decide to take a vitamin or supplement, look for products that are designed for men who are TTC. Ideally you should start taking these around 3 months before TTC as sperm production takes approximately 3 months.

## Caffeine

**For her:** Drinking a lot of caffeine when TTC and during pregnancy has been linked to fertility problems and miscarriage. Caffeine can be found in lots of things such as tea, coffee, cola and chocolate.

**Action:** The NHS recommends a limit of 200 milligram a day of caffeine, which is the equivalent of two mugs of instant coffee.

## Alcohol

**For her:** We hate to be the bearer of bad news but. The Chief Medical Officers for the UK recommend that if you are planning to become pregnant or are pregnant, the safest approach is to not drink at all. This is because alcohol can harm developing babies and there is currently no proven safe amount of alcohol a woman can drink during pregnancy. If you do enjoy a drink we fully understand that this can be difficult, especially if it is taking longer to get pregnant than you thought.

**For him:** Drinking alcohol within the recommended limit of 3-4 units per day is unlikely to affect your semen quality. However, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can affect semen quality. Drinking alcohol can also affect your sex drive and even cause erectile problems. If you are going to have a drink, it is also important that you avoid saving your daily units up for a weekend binge. For more information check out our video with Professor Allan Pacey who offers some practical information for men regarding drinking when TTC.

**Action for both:** If either of you are struggling with the necessary changes to drinking, we would recommend that you have a chat with your doctor. For more information, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists have developed a very helpful patient information leaflet.

## Smoking

**For her:** Direct or passive smoking is likely to reduce your fertility and take you longer to get pregnant than a non-smoker. Smoking can age your ovaries and have a negative impact on your fallopian tubes and the lining of your womb. To learn more about why smoking can affect your fertility watch our video with Kate Davies, Fertility Nurse Consultant.

**For him:** Apart from affecting erectile function, smoking can also reduce semen quality. The effects of smoking on sperm production are more complicated than you might think. To learn more about the impact of smoking on your swimmers, watch our video with Professor Allan Pacey.

**Action for you both:** It is important for both of you to stop smoking when TTC. Stopping will also improve your general health. You can talk to your pharmacist or doctor about smoking cessation programmes and the products available to help you quit. The NHS Smoking Helpline can also provide advice and support. The phone number is 03001231044 and the website is [www.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://www.smokefree.nhs.uk).

## Prescribed, over-the-counter and recreational drugs

**Over the counter medication:** Some medicines bought over the counter or prescribed by your doctor, as well as recreational drugs, can affect both female and male fertility.

**Cannabis:** The sperm of cannabis users tend to have poorer size and shape, which means they're less likely to navigate through the woman's body to reach and fertilise the egg.

**Anabolic steroids:** These steroids have been found to disrupt the hormones that control sperm production so any man who is taking anabolic steroids runs the risk of infertility. It is reversible but it can take many years to recover.

**Action for both:** If you are taking any type of drug please seek advice from your doctor before TTC and always avoid any drugs such as cannabis and anabolic steroids that are known to affect fertility.

## Protein shakes

**For him:** This one might surprise you! Poor sperm quality has been associated with men who regularly consume protein shakes. The reason for this is currently unknown but it is thought that this could be because some protein shakes are contaminated with anabolic steroid type substances, that can disrupt the hormones that control sperm production.

**Action:** Go to the gym, sweat and work hard to build your muscle mass naturally and avoid taking protein shakes. Consider making natural protein shakes with milk, a banana and whatever else you enjoy when you get home.

## Sexually transmitted Infections

**For both:** Are you secretly worried about sexually transmitted infections (STIs)? We understand that this can be an embarrassing topic of conversation, even if you have been with your partner a long time. These infections affect both men and women and some don't necessarily cause you symptoms but can affect your fertility. Chlamydia, one of the most common STIs in the UK, can be a cause of fertility problems for both men and women. Sexually transmitted infections can also cause health problems for women during pregnancy and for the baby. They can even be passed on to the baby during labour.

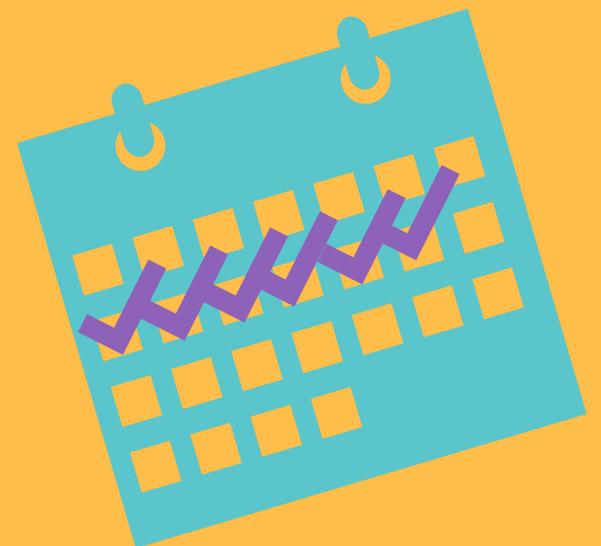
**Action:** Most STIs can easily be treated but some treatments are not suitable when you are pregnant. If you have any concerns that you might have a STI, it is very important for both of you to get tested. You can find information on where your local genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic is by contacting the Sexual Health Line on 0300 123 7123 or the Family Planning Association's website [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk).

## Your job

**For both:** It is thought that some occupations are not as fertility-friendly as others, especially if they involve you being exposed to chemicals, radiation or pesticides. It is also thought that occupations that can affect the temperature of the man's scrotum, such as driving or working in a kitchen or a bakery, can affect sperm production.

**Action:** If you are concerned that your occupation could affect your fertility, discuss this with your doctor and your manager at work to see if any adjustments to your role could be made while you're TTC.

# **Step 2: Get #Cyclesavvy and Understand the Best Time for Baby Making**



## Step 2: Get #Cyclesavvy and understand the best time for baby making

A common reason why it can take couples longer than they expected to conceive, is not having sex at the right time during a woman's cycle. A woman has a fertile window of approximately six days per cycle, commencing five days before ovulation and including the day that she ovulates.

We all know that scheduling sex is not always fun, especially when TTC. Increasing the frequency of baby making after your period is a relaxed way to increase your chances of getting pregnant. Baby dancing regularly (every couple of days) during your fertile window will give you the best chance of getting pregnant. However, if this is not possible, 2 to 3 times per week is adequate.

For various reasons some couples may be having sex less often or are keen to maximise their chances of conception and prefer to try and predict their fertile window and when ovulation is taking place. There are several ways you can use to do this:

1. Observe your natural fertility indicators
2. Use an app or website to calculate ovulation
3. Use an ovulation predictor kit or fertility monitor

### Observing natural fertility indicators

Monitoring your fertility indicators is a natural and inexpensive way to get in tune with your body when TTC. The key fertility indicators that women frequently use to predict their ovulation include:

**Cervical mucus:** The probability of conception is highest when your cervical mucus can be described as slippery, clear and of egg white consistency. You may also notice an increase in the volume of cervical mucus at the same time. Due to the life of the sperm, whenever you notice any cervical mucus you are potentially fertile or soon to ovulate.

**Basal body temperature (BBT):** This is your lowest body temperature in a 24-hour period. It is important to take your temperature as soon as you wake up before you do anything, even get out of bed. You should expect a rise in your BBT of around half a degree when ovulation occurs. A limitation to this method is that you may only realise that you have ovulated after it has happened and your fertile window could be over until your next cycle. However if used in conjunction with observing your cervical mucus, you are able to effectively determine when you are fertile. To help monitor your BBT you can download our free chart.

## **Ovulation calculators and apps**

A number of websites and mobile phone apps are now available that offer predictions of ovulation dates and your 'fertile window'. Most of these are based on the calendar method and work by asking the user to enter the date of their last menstruation and their average cycle length (the number of days from the first day of your period to the day before your next period). However, these tools are not accurate for everyone because many are based on the assumption that all women have a 28-day cycle and ovulate on day 14, which is often not the case, especially if you have irregular cycles. These tools can be useful though to keep a record of your cycle dates and give you a rough guide of when you are fertile to use in combination with observing your natural fertility indicators.

## **Ovulation tests aka Ovulation Predictor Kits (OPKs)**

Your luteinizing hormone (LH) levels can be used as another fertility indicator. A surge in LH triggers ovulation and can be detected in a women's urine 12-24 hours before ovulation helping to identify the 2 most fertile days of your cycle. Some of the newer ovulation tests can detect both estrogen and LH and help to identify around 4 fertile days each cycle. Ovulation tests are not suitable for everyone. Some women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) may have high levels of LH even when they are not ovulating which can lead to misleading results. Other women may naturally have low baseline levels of LH that won't be detected by a traditional ovulation test even during their LH surge, leading to false negative results.

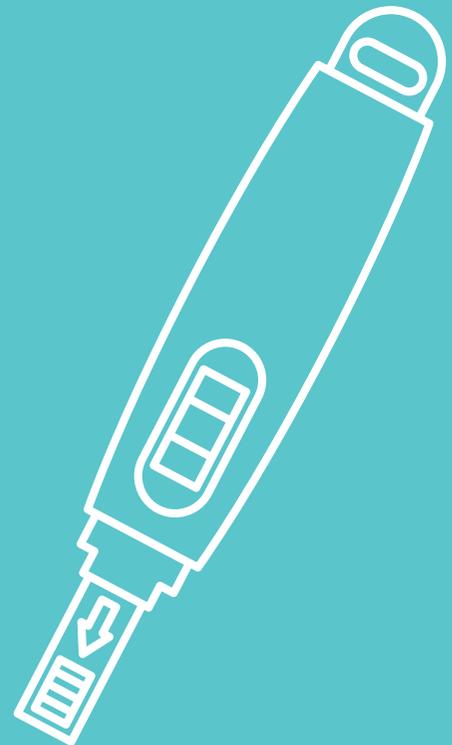
## Fertility monitors

A fertility monitor is an electronic device that helps you to track your cycle to learn more about your body and when you are fertile. Many fertility monitors are linked to an app that will visually display your data, removing any guesswork. Fertility monitors track various fertility indicators such as hormone levels in your urine, body temperature and pulse rate. In general, they offer you much more than a traditional ovulation test, including prediction of more fertile days (some can predict your entire fertile window), storage of personal information such as cycle length, sexual intercourse dates and allow you to share your data with your doctor or partner. At the moment, most fertility monitors are designed for women but watch this space as technology solutions are currently being developed for men too!

Unfortunately, not all fertility monitors are suitable for women with irregular cycles or PCOS, so if this applies to you, please check first before buying one.

If you want to learn more about becoming #cyclesavvy, watch our educational video series with Fertility Nurse Consultant Kate Davies.

# Step 3: The Fertility Products You Can Use



## Step 3: The fertility products you can use

We have already discussed vitamins and supplements, ovulation tests and fertility monitors that you can use when TTC, but there are other products too that you might not have come across that can also help you on your fertility journey.

### Home fertility tests

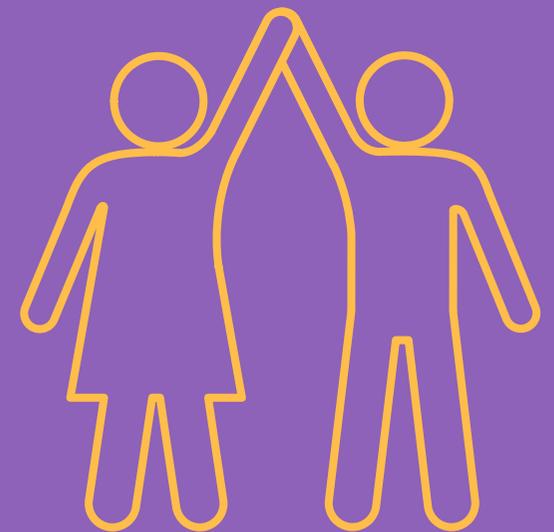
**For her:** You can use home testing kits to learn more about your fertility potential early on in your fertility journey and is a good first step in identifying if there are any potential problems in the comfort of your own home. Examples include tests for Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and Anti Mullerian Hormone (AMH).

**For him:** Home sperm testing kits are not a substitute for a laboratory test and it is particularly important to be aware that home sperm tests do not offer a complete test and therefore complete reassurance. However, they can often be a good place to start if you feel a bit embarrassed about seeing a doctor about your swimmers. If the test suggests that you could have a problem then we would recommend discussing your results with your doctor.

**Fertility lubricants for both:** Sperm friendly lubricants can be used when TTC. The benefits include mimicking natural cervical fluids and giving the women more moisture down there, creating an optimal environment for swimmers, plus they can feel great! So it's more fun for both of you.

**Anti-radiation phone cases for him:** Help to protect your manhood and keep your tackle tip top! This is important because keeping your phone in your pocket has been shown to damage your swimmers.

# **Step 4: Try To Maintain Fun On Your Fertility Journey**



## Step 4: Try to maintain fun on your fertility journey

**Relax gate:** Couples who are TTC are often told to 'just relax' or 'think positively' and it will happen. This can be very upsetting, even though it has been said with good intentions. If only it were that simple! The relationship between stress and fertility is complex and still unclear. There are lots of studies that look at the effect of stress in couples TTC and the results are variable. Trying for a baby can be a stressful experience, which can also have a negative impact on your relationship and your sex drive. We believe it is very important for everyone to recognise that this is absolutely normal and to be kind to yourselves, plan nice things and keep enjoying yourselves. It is also important to find your own personal way to manage stress. This may involve joining a support group or taking some time out to do some exercise or an activity that you enjoy. Making sure you get enough sleep can also help to reduce stress. But if you do feel it is getting too much, we recommend seeking some expert support.

**Pressure to perform:** Whilst understanding that timing is important, baby making can become routine and men often feel pressure to perform. Remember it is normal for it to take up to 1 year to get pregnant. So, it is really important to keep sex as fun and stress-free as possible because it may not happen straight away.

**Avoid storing sperm:** Many men believe that if they don't ejaculate for a long period of time, then when they ejaculate the next time, they will produce lots of super swimmers, but this is actually a myth. When the sperm exit the sperm production factory, they are then stored until the point of ejaculation. The optimum time of storage is usually just two or three days, which means you ideally want to be ejaculating sperm within two or three days of them leaving the production line...meaning more fun time for you too.

# **Step 5: Knowing When It Is Time To See Your Doctor**



## Step 5: knowing when it is time to see your doctor

We would recommend visiting your doctor if:

- 1) You have no medical problems, the woman is less than 35 and you have been TTC for 12 months without success
- 2) You have no medical problems, the woman is 35 or over and you have been TTC for 6 months without success
- 3) Either of you have any concerns about your fertility, have any current or previous medical problems, or are taking any medication

You can find out more about preparing to see your doctor here.

Further resources on [www.dr fertility.co.uk](http://www.dr fertility.co.uk):

- **Spermbanter** video series with Professor Allan Pacey for male fertility
- **Cyclesavvy** video series with Kate Davies, Fertility Nurse Consultant, to help you get in tune with your cycle
- **PCOSPower** video series with Kate Davies, Fertility Nurse Consultant, if you want to learn more about PCOS and how to manage it

# Your TTC Action Plan



## Your TTC Action Plan

### For her:

- Maintain your weight within the healthy BMI range (18.5-24.9)
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet and include your 5 a day
- Understand the benefits of exercising when TTC
- Limit your caffeine consumption to 200mg a day
- Take folic acid at the correct dose for you
- Stop drinking alcohol (sorry)
- If you are a smoker, it's time to stop
- Talk to your doctor if you have any pre-existing physical medical conditions such as diabetes or epilepsy, or mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder before TTC
- Assess your stress levels and take action if required
- Talk to your doctor if you take any regular prescribed or over the counter medicine
- Don't take any recreational drugs
- Ensure your smear is up to date
- Ensure your rubella vaccinations are up to date
- Have a sexual health check up
- Get #cyclesavvy and understand the best time for baby dancing
- Explore fertility products that could help you on your fertility journey
- Don't forget to have fun and regular sex
- If you have any concerns talk to your doctor

## For him:

- Maintain your weight within the healthy BMI range (18.5-24.9)
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet and include your 5 a day
- Understand the benefits of exercising when TTC
- Reduce your alcohol consumption
- If you are a smoker, it's time to stop
- Talk to your doctor if you have any pre-existing physical medical or mental health conditions before TTC
- Assess your stress levels and take action if required
- Talk to your doctor if you take any regular prescribed or over the counter medicine
- Don't take any recreational drugs or anabolic steroids
- Don't take protein shakes
- Have a sexual health check up
- Think about whether your job is fertility friendly and make any necessary changes
- Explore fertility products that could help you on your fertility journey
- Avoid storing your sperm and have sex every 2-3 days
- If you have any concerns talk to your doctor

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***Wishing you lots of  
luck on your fertility  
journey***



Dr.Fertility