



Women's World
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When getting pregnant isn't as easy as it sounds.

BIOLGY makes it sound so easy – a man and a woman, sperm meets egg, and nine months later, a baby makes its grand appearance.

What many women and their husbands have come to discover is that this "miracle of life" does not come so easily to everyone. For whatever reason, it may take more than simple desire and romance for a couple to conceive.

Don't worry, it's not rocket science ... but you might need a little knowledge of reproductive science!

Reproduction 101

You probably remember this from science classes in school, but here's a quick reminder of how Nature works.

Every month, a woman releases an egg from her ovaries, in a process called "ovulation". Ovulation generally occurs about two weeks before her next menstrual period begins.

The egg will travel to the fallopian tubes, where it awaits the arrival of male sperm to fertilise it. In order to conceive, the egg has to be penetrated by sperm within six to 12 hours after release.

After the egg has been fertilised, it will start dividing, forming a ball of cells that will travel down the fallopian tubes and eventually attach to the lining of the uterus in three to five days, a process called implantation.

This is the beginning of the embryo, which will slowly transform into a baby over the next nine months!

Making sure everything is in good shape

Already you can see how many elements are involved in ensuring successful conception. All it takes is one little thing to be out of step for the pregnancy test to be negative.

A common cause of fertility problems is ovulation. Some women do not release an egg from their ovaries every month. This is usually related to some form of hormone imbalance, which could be caused by a variety of conditions, including polycystic ovary syndrome, thyroid gland disorders, adrenal gland disorders, excessive exercise, diabetes, weight loss, obesity, or psychologic stress.

There could also be other reasons, such as problems with the fallopian tubes or mucus in the cervix.

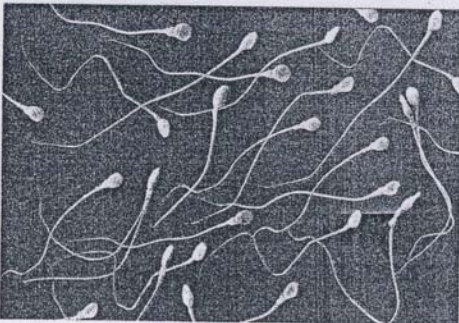
Age may also be a factor, as women become less fertile after the age of 35.

It takes two to conceive, however, so let's take a look at what problems men may experience, particularly with their "little swimmers".

A number of problems can occur with male sperm, such as low sperm count, increase in abnormal sperm and not-so-active sperm.

It is important to remember

The mating game



Sperm can survive inside the womb for two to three days. - Schering AG photo

that you are not necessarily infertile just because you have tried to get pregnant once or twice, and failed.

You may just have a lower chance of conceiving compared to some other couples. But it's not a zero chance, so there's no need to despair.

Timing

Getting pregnant is a bit like winning the lottery. That's because there are so many elements that need to be just right – and there's only a 20-30% chance of conceiving in each cycle.

Therefore, it is really important to get the timing right. Remember that a woman usually ovulates about two weeks before her cycle begins, and the egg has to be fertilised within six to 12 hours.

Also, sperm can survive inside the womb for two to three days, so a few days before ovulation, or during, is the best time to have intercourse.

But how do you chart when you will ovulate? The method of counting days is not very reliable, because not all women are as regular as a clock.

A more effective method is the Basal Body Temperature (BBT) method, which involves charting the temperature of the body every day.

Just as a woman is about to begin ovulating, her body temperature will rise. You can check this with a basal body thermometer – different from a normal thermometer – every day. Your vaginal mucous will also increase. It is clear in colour – like raw egg white, slippery and "stretchy".

As you can see, having intercourse every day, even twice a day, for an entire month, is not necessarily the most effective in terms of conception.

However, if you have intercourse at the right time, you have a far better chance of hitting that lottery.

Getting help

For some couples, being unable to get pregnant may be more than just timing issues – it may be due to a bigger problem, such as infertility.

If you have been trying to get pregnant for a year, and failed, you should seek advice from your

doctor for counselling and treatment.

Lastly, it's important to maintain a healthy lifestyle throughout your life.

Both women and men trying to conceive should not smoke and drink. Some prescription drugs can be harmful to the conception process and pregnancy, so get your doctor's advice if you are trying to get pregnant.

There is no shame in asking for help and advice if you can't get pregnant. Some women and men think of it as "their fault". But it is not anyone's fault ... just the mysterious way in which Nature works.

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