



## **1 LIFESTYLE ISSUES AND FERTILITY**

A few lifestyle issues have been linked to both male and female fertility, these include smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, body weight, diet and exercise.

Both men and women can make some lifestyle changes that will increase your chances of conceiving:

- body weight affects your reproductive function
- consider adapting a more healthy lifestyle

Do some form of exercise everyday

- Walk instead of taking the bus
- Take the stairs instead of the lift
- Go for a swim
- Regular, moderate exercise of around 30 minutes a day helps to maximise your fitness

Above all be realistic with yourself in what you want to achieve.

If you feel you need help in achieving your ideal weight, contact the Fertility Clinic for an appointment with the dietician.

### **1.1 Alcohol**

Maternal and paternal alcohol consumption in excess of 12g (one unit) per day, up to one year before assisted reproduction, has been associated with a significant decrease in the success rates of IVF.

For men it is proven that excessive alcohol intake is detrimental to semen quality.

Drinking no more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice per week and avoiding episodes of intoxication reduces the risk of harming a developing foetus.

### **1.2 Smoking**

Maternal and paternal smoking before assisted reproduction has been associated with significant decreases in the success rates of IVF.

Women who smoke are likely to reduce their fertility and AFC offer referral to a smoking cessation programme to support your efforts in stopping smoking.

Passive smoking is likely to affect the chances of conceiving as well and should not be underestimated.

There is an association between smoking and reduced semen quality. Stopping smoking will improve the man's general health as well.

### **1.3 Body Weight**

BMI is a measure of body fat calculated from an individual's weight and height and we should aim for a BMI between 20-25.

Women who have a body mass index of more than 25 are likely to take longer to conceive and losing weight is likely to increase their chance of conception.

Participating in a group programme involving exercise and dietary advice leads to more pregnancies than weight loss advice alone.

Men who have a body mass index of more than 25 should be advised to consider losing weight.



Women who have a body mass index of less than 19 may be advised to increase their body weight as this is likely to improve their chance of conception. Should your BMI be greater than 35 treatment will not be started within AFC.

#### **1.4 Diet and Exercise**

A healthy balanced diet and moderate exercise as an essential part of a healthy lifestyle are proven to improve general well being. It helps to achieve a body weight within the normal range which is proven to improve fertility.

#### **1.5 Tight fitting underwear for Men**

There is an association between elevated scrotal temperature and reduced semen quality, but that it is uncertain whether wearing loose-fitting underwear improves fertility.

#### **1.6 Prescribed, over-the-counter and recreational Drug Use**

Some prescription medication can lessen your chances of conceiving, so if you are taking medication and trying for a baby please talk to your GP about alternatives.

A number of prescription, over-the-counter and recreational drugs interfere with male and female fertility, you should discuss any medication or drugs you take with your doctor at your initial appointment.

Street drugs such as marijuana and cocaine should be avoided.

#### **1.7 Counselling**

Within the Centre the nursing staff are trained in counselling skills however there is also an independent counselling service available. A counsellor is trained to listen carefully and works in a non-directive way to allow the person to find their own solutions and way forward. Counselling may help to support individuals and couples throughout any part of their treatment process. To arrange an appointment contact the nursing staff within AFC.

#### **1.8 Complementary Therapy**

The effectiveness of complementary therapies for fertility problems has not been properly evaluated. Therefore, further research is needed before such interventions can be recommended.

#### **1.9 Folic Acid Supplementation**

Dietary supplementation with folic acid (400 micrograms daily) before conception and up to 12 weeks' gestation reduces the risk of having a baby with neural tube defects. For women who have previously had an infant with a neural tube defect or who are receiving anti-epileptic medication, a higher dose is recommended.

#### **1.10 Sources of Further Information**

NICE Guidelines website <http://www.nice.org.uk/>

HFEA website, Your Health section <http://www.hfea.gov.uk/en/803.html>

**If you require any further advice please discuss any specific issues with the doctor or the nurse on the day of your appointment.**