

Healthy Living

In preparation for treatment

A healthy lifestyle can improve your fertility and can also increase your chances of successful treatment. There are some simple steps that can be taken to increase your chances of achieving a successful outcome.

Stop Smoking

The most important thing you can do if you smoke is - give up! Smoking cessation significantly improves chances for conception. Although long-term cigarette smoking can have an irreversible effect on ovarian function, if smoking is discontinued prior to the start of treatment, the harmful effect on treatment outcome can be reduced. **Note: stopping smoking is essential if a referral for IVF is required.** Useful support services include the NHS smoking helpline on 03001231044, the nursing staff at the Hewitt Centre, or your GP/practice nurse.

Achieve the correct body mass index

Weight can affect the fertility of both male and females. Women who have a normal body mass index (BMI) are more likely to conceive and to have a normal pregnancy than those who do not. It is important that you are both as near to your ideal BMI as possible. You should aim for a BMI of between 19 and 29.9 (ideally 21 to 25). If you wish to see a state registered dietician for individual advice, ask your GP or Practice Nurse to refer you to a community dietician. **Note: a healthy BMI is essential if a referral for IVF is required.**

Alcohol, what are sensible limits?

Excessive alcohol reduces fertility & damages sperm. For general health purposes, the safe limits are up to 14 units per week for both men and women. It is better to have one to two units occasionally rather than saving them all up for one night! **Following updated advice from the Department of Health, women should avoid alcohol completely pre-conceptually and in pregnancy, as no safe level of maternal drinking has been established.** Furthermore, men trying for a baby should limit alcohol intake to no more than 6 units per week

Maintain a healthy diet and take Folic Acid

It is strongly recommended that women take 400µg of folic acid per day, 3 months before pregnancy and until 12 weeks after conception. Good dietary sources of folic acid include fortified breakfast cereals, fortified bread, sprouts, spinach, Bovril and oranges.

Take Regular Exercise

Regular exercise improves physical fitness, helps you to lose weight and decreases stress levels. Aim for some form of aerobic exercise three times per week; i.e. any activity that increases your heart rate and breathing, such as brisk walking, jogging, swimming, or sporting activities like football, tennis or squash. Even using stairs instead of using lifts/escalators and walking to the shops can make a difference and will improve your fitness.

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Drink plenty of water

Our bodies need between 8 and 10 cups of fluid per day. Some studies suggest that excessive caffeine can reduce your fertility – Tea, Coffee, Cola and ‘energy’ drinks e.g. Red Bull are particularly high in caffeine – try caffeine free alternatives or drink water or squash. When you are having your treatment we will suggest that you cut down on caffeine by avoiding coffee and replacing some cups of tea with water.

Improve Sperm Quality

The normal activity of the sperm producing tubules in the testes can be affected by heat. Intermittent overheating of the testes leads to a reduction in sperm production and/or a decrease in sperm activity (motility). To improve your fertility you should: avoid hot baths, jacuzzis and saunas and change to having showers or lukewarm baths. You should also wear non-support, non-insulating cotton boxer shorts. Remember that sperm take 70 days to develop from their cells of origin, so any episode of testicular overheating could affect your fertility for over two months. Finally, there is also some evidence to suggest that taking zinc and vitamin E supplements may improve sperm quality.

Follow a Healthy Eating Plan

- Eat regular meals
- Enjoy your food
- Eat a wide variety of different foods
- Try to eat 5 portions of either fruit or vegetables each day

Why is healthy eating important?

It helps you to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. It ensures your body has sufficient vitamins and minerals – essential for men & women trying to conceive. It ensures your body has enough energy for all your daily activities.

Eat More Fruit and Vegetables

- Fruit and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins and minerals
- Aim for at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- If you are trying to lose weight, fruit makes an excellent snack or dessert
- Choose fresh, frozen or tinned (avoid tinned fruit in syrup)

One portion is:

- 1 apple or pear or banana
- 1 slice of melon or pineapple
- 2 plums or satsumas
- 1 cup of strawberries/raspberries
- 2 tablespoons of vegetables (raw, cooked, frozen or canned)
- 1 dessert bowl of salad

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Fill up on starchy foods

- This includes bread, cereals and potatoes
- Try wholegrain varieties where possible e.g. wholemeal bread, bran flakes etc.
- These are higher in vitamins and minerals and also help to fill you up -so you are less tempted to snack between meals

Meat Fish and Alternatives

- These foods are important for protein and iron as well as other nutrients
- Vegetarians should include pulses, beans or nuts to replace meat or fish
- Take care with fat content of meat or fish- especially if trying to reduce your weight

Dairy Products

- Milk, cheese, yoghurt or calcium-rich dairy alternatives are important for calcium, protein and other nutrients
- Choose low fat varieties as much as possible, for example, skimmed milk, cottage cheese or low fat yoghurt (especially if trying to lose weight)
- Low fat varieties have as much calcium as the regular versions

Occasional Foods

- Many snack and convenience foods contain lots of fat and sugar e.g. sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, crisps and pastries.
- They are low in vitamins and minerals and high in calories, so should only be eaten occasionally.
- Added fats e.g. butter, oils and margarine should be used sparingly.

Take Folic Acid

- Good dietary sources of folic acid include fortified breakfast cereals, fortified bread, sprouts, spinach, Bovril and oranges.

Do I need to take any other supplements?

Please seek advice from a pharmacist before taking any other vitamin supplements or herbal remedies.

Want to know more?

- Ask your GP to refer you to a State Registered Dietician.
- Visit the 'Eating for Pregnancy' Website at www.eatingforpregnancy.co.uk

Other Factors

The use of certain medications, including anabolic steroids or recreational drugs such as marijuana can affect your sperm quality. If you are taking any medication please discuss this with the unit staff.

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Following investigation or treatment

If referral for *In-Vitro* Fertilisation (IVF) is required, an assessment will be made as to whether or not you meet your Clinical Commissioning Groups criteria for NHS funded treatment. Below is an example of some of the criteria that you will be assessed against.

Age

Smoking status

Previous sterilisation or vasectomy

Body mass index (BMI)

Previous children

Previous private cycles

If you do not meet the criteria for NHS funded treatment, you will be informed and your options for self-funded treatment will be discussed.

Cope With Stress

We know from couples undergoing fertility treatment that their experience can be an extremely stressful one. This is understandable; especially if a couple believe that their future happiness depends upon a successful treatment outcome. Stress in such a situation is unavoidable. However, it is not stress itself that causes problems but the way in which an individual responds to it.

Without positive ways of dealing with stress, a couple undergoing infertility treatment may experience some very negative symptoms such as:

- Insomnia
- Fatigue – constant lack of energy
- Anxiety
- Inability to concentrate for long periods
- Mood swings
- Depression

Staff at the unit want to help couples avoid the distress such symptoms bring about. For this reason we recommend that you give some thought now as to the coping mechanisms you currently use to deal with stress. Are they positive and likely to get you through treatment in good shape? Or are they negative and therefore likely to make the situation worse?

Here are some ways of coping positively with stress that some couples have found helpful:

- Yoga
- Physical exercise – swimming, running etc.
- Learning how to relax – using tapes/podcasts, music, books, acupuncture, for example.
- Stress management courses – night school, information from GPs, libraries etc.
- Support – building your own network using friends, family and counsellors

Counselling is available at the Hewitt Centre, before, during and after treatment, should you require it. For further information or to arrange an appointment please contact the counselling service via 0151 702 4075 ([Liverpool](#) service) or 0151 702 4171 ([Knutsford](#) service).

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