

Understanding Fertility: A Guide for Women over 35



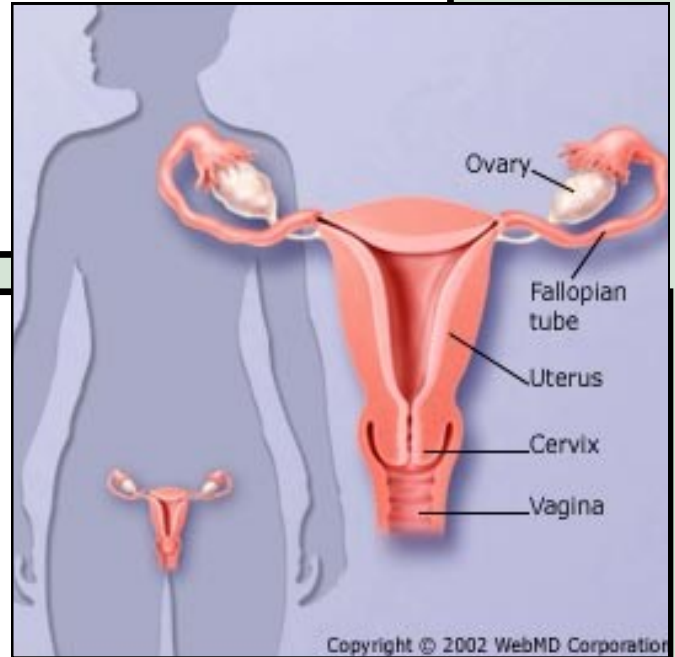
Fertility is the ability to conceive and produce babies - it is a balancing act in our bodies. For a successful pregnancy to occur, many factors - male and female - play a part. When people experience difficulty becoming or staying pregnant, it can be due to a number of reasons in one or both partners. This document will discuss issues that may be faced by women seeking pregnancy over the age of 35. The information discussed in this document can also be found via [this video](#).

A woman's ability to get pregnant depends on **many factors** including: the health of her ovaries and their ability to produce eggs (ovulate), the openness of her fallopian tubes (to allow the egg to travel), the ability of her uterus to allow a fertilized egg to burrow (implant), and the release of the right hormones at the right time of the menstrual cycle.

As we get older, changes occur that can shift the balance of fertility in different ways.

Here are some facts about women's fertility:

- Women are born with all the eggs they will ever have. The number of eggs start to decrease early in life for reasons that we don't fully understand
- Fertility begins with puberty and the onset of periods (on average between 11 and 13 years)
- After puberty occurs, women start to ovulate and release an egg with each menstrual cycle. Pregnancy can occur if intercourse is timed around ovulation
- Menstrual cycles are generally every 25-35 days
- As women age, menstrual cycles get shorter: this usually begins when women are in their late 30s
- With age, the quantity and quality of eggs goes down
- Menopause marks the end of regular menstrual cycles (on average around 50-51 years old)
- Reproductive potential begins to decrease about 10 years before menopause



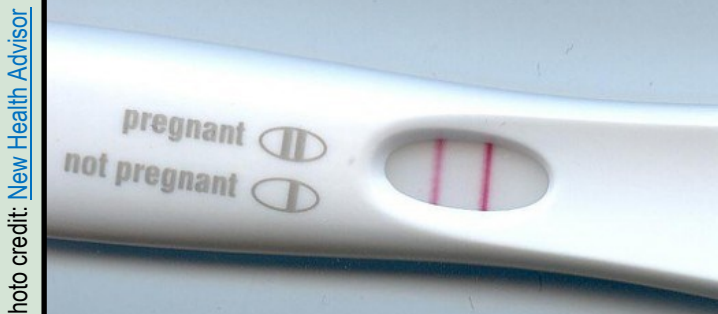
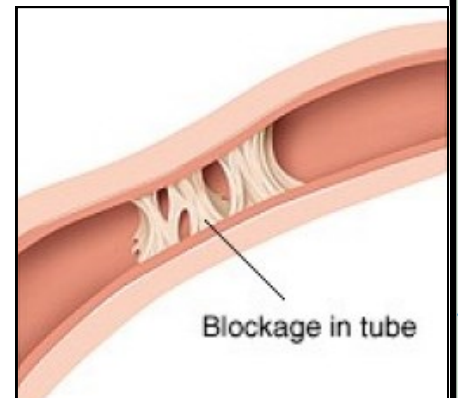
What are indicators of fertility?

- **Egg quality** – this is very important, and is directly related to how well the embryo will implant into the uterus and the risk of miscarriage. It is important to note that there aren't ways to determine an egg's quality. We only know that quality decreases with age.

- **Is there adequate**

sperm? Does your partner produce enough sperm? Lower sperm count can impede or reduce the chances of fertilization. Check out [this video](#) for more information about male fertility issues and options.

- **Fallopian tubes are open.** Is there scarring in the fallopian tubes?



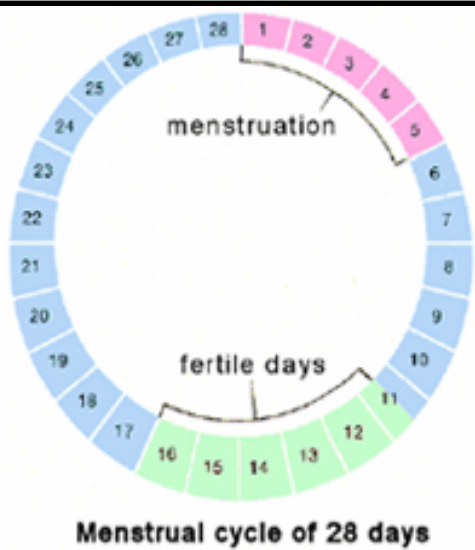
What is Infertility?

Infertility is defined differently depending on a woman's age:


- For women under 35: 12 months of trying to conceive via frequent sex without contraception
- For women over 35: 6 months of trying to conceive via frequent sex without contraception

What can a healthcare provider do? A clinician can help diagnose fertility problems and provide solutions to maximize the chance of pregnancy including:

- Blood tests to help detect hormonal issues:
- [Follicle Stimulating Hormone](#) – helps manage the menstrual cycle and stimulates egg production
- [Anti-Mullerian Hormone](#) – helps assess potential to conceive and responses to fertility treatment
- [Hysterosalpingogram](#) – an x-ray with dye which can confirm if tubes are open
- [Semen analysis](#) – measure the quality and amount of a man's semen and sperm



What are some ways to improve chances of pregnancy at home?

- **Timed intercourse.** Check out [this video](#) on timed intercourse.
 - *To increase the chance of pregnancy, the best time to have sex is the day of ovulation and 24 hours later.*
 - **Use ovulation predictor kits** (Ovulation test kits can be bought for about \$20 and test urine for hormones that go up when ovulation is about to begin). 
 - Avoid over-the-counter lubricants- [these can affect sperm mobility](#) (mineral oil or any kind of vegetable oil are good substitutes)
 - Quit smoking. Smoking decreases fertility in both men and women, and can lead to early menopause.
- Don't drink excessively. [Studies](#) have found a link between excessive alcohol use and longer time to conceive
 - Talk to your doctor before getting pregnant to improve your overall health. This is especially important if you have medical problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity or asthma.

Additional information for women over 40

- Women over 40 have an **increased risk of miscarriage** because of the natural degenerative process that occurs in the ovaries and eggs.
- Women who are pregnant after age 40 have a **higher risk of pregnancy complications** like high blood pressure and preeclampsia, and their doctors may suggest additional monitoring in pregnancy.
- Talk to your healthcare provider and seek support to become pregnant and maintain a healthy pregnancy in your 40's.

Questions? For more info, check out www.hiveonline.org or contact Shannon Weber at 415.206.8919

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