

Trying to Conceive?

Your fertility facts — a patient guide to two sections of NICE guideline NG257 (2026).

01 Your chances of conceiving

80%+

of couples conceive naturally within 1 year (woman under 40, regular unprotected sex)

Every 2–3 days

having sex this often gives the best chance of conceiving

90%+

have conceived by 2 years — about half of those who don't succeed in year 1 do so in year 2

CHANCES OF CONCEIVING NATURALLY, BY AGE

● within 1 year ● within 2 years



Fertility gradually declines with age — for both women and (to a lesser extent) men. Table 1, NG257.



Using artificial insemination (IUI)?

47–57% of women under 40 conceive within 6 cycles (rate depends on age). Of those who don't, about half do so with 6 more cycles — a cumulative rate of 72–81%. Timing insemination around ovulation matters.

02 10 factors that can affect your fertility



Alcohol

Women: 1–2 units, once/twice weekly (safest: none). Men: under 14 units/week.



Smoking

Reduces fertility in women (passive smoke too) and lowers sperm quality in men.



Caffeine

No consistent evidence tea, coffee, energy drinks or cola affect fertility.



Being overweight

BMI 30+: may take longer to conceive. Exercise + diet advice together works best.



Being underweight

BMI under 18.5 with irregular periods? Gaining weight may improve your chances.



Tight underwear

Higher scrotal temperature is linked to lower semen quality.



Occupation

Some jobs involve exposures that can reduce fertility — ask occupational health.



Medicines & drugs

Tell your care team about any prescription, OTC or recreational drug use.



Complementary therapies

Effectiveness for fertility problems hasn't been proven yet.



Folic acid

Take a folic acid supplement when trying to conceive — ask your GP.