**Future fathers: 10 ways to help her get pregnant**

When a couple is trying to get pregnant, "most of the attention is focused on the woman," Cole says, "but men make up half of the equation." If you're thinking about becoming a dad, here's a list of what you can do to ensure a healthy pregnancy before trying to conceive.

### Check in with your doctor

Make an appointment to see your doctor, especially if you have a chronic disease, take any medication, or experience problems with erections, ejaculation, or loss of libido.

1. **Get a physical:** It's a good idea to have a complete physical exam so your doctor can check for conditions that may affect fertility. Some conditions to watch out for include:

* Varicoceles, which are varicose veins on the scrotum, the sac of skin that contains the testicles. Varicoceles prevent the testicles from cooling normally, which doctors think may lead to fewer, misshapen, or less mobile sperm. 40 percent of men with fertility problems also have varicoceles. The condition is entirely treatable, so talk to your doctor about the options.
* Sexually transmitted infections (STI), which may cause male infertility. Your doctor can help you get tested and treated.
* Conditions such as prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) or mumps (which may result in swollen testicles) may lead to infertility.

1. **Discuss your medical history:** You'll also want to talk to your doctor about your family's medical history. If your ethnic background predisposes you to certain medical conditions, or if you have a family history of birth defects (including genetic or chromosomal disorders, intellectual disability, or other developmental delays), you and your partner should have genetic counseling. This type of counseling helps you find out what risks you face and which screening tests to consider before pregnancy.
2. **Be wary of certain drugs and supplements:** Be sure to let your doctor know about everything you're taking, whether it's prescribed or over-the-counter. Certain medications can affect either the quality or quantity of sperm and cause male fertility problems. Such drugs include:

* Any steroid or hormone
* Some high blood pressure drugs
* A few antibiotics
* Some medications used to treat diseases like fungal infections, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, peptic ulcers, and seizures
* In most cases, the effect is reversible once you go off the drugs. Talk to your doctor about your plans to become a dad, and find out if you can safely switch to a different medication.
* Anabolic steroids, which bodybuilders often use to bulk up, are well studied, and evidence shows they can reduce sperm count and shrink the testicles. Though herbs and supplements may seem harmless, your doctor is the best person to judge whether they can interfere with your ability to father a child.

1. **Find out about potential hazards:** Last, ask your doctor about any hazards you may be exposed to on the job or elsewhere. Exposure to pesticides, heavy metals, and organic solvents, for example, can affect the quality and quantity of your sperm.

* Certain hobbies may expose you to harsh chemicals as well. Refinishing furniture, repairing cars, painting, building models, or any other activity that uses strippers, degreasers, or non-water-based glues and paints can expose you to solvents.
* Similarly, making pottery or stained glass windows and handling, shooting, and cleaning guns may expose you to lead or other heavy metals. That doesn't mean you have to drop all your hobbies and take up knitting, just check with your doctor to see what your risk level is.

### Get in touch with your medical roots

* It's a good idea to find out about your family health history, so call your parents, siblings, or other relatives to get the medical scoop. If they get suspicious and you're not ready to share your news, tell them you're trying out a new healthcare provider.
* The most important thing to ask is whether anyone in your family has a genetic or chromosomal disorder, such as Down syndrome, sickle-cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, Tay-Sachs disease, or bleeding disorders.
* It's also important to note that some conditions are related to ethnic background. For example, Tay-Sachs is common among Ashkenazi Jews, and sickle-cell anemia occurs more frequently among African Americans than most other ethnic groups.
* You'll also want to find out if any relatives have intellectual disability or other developmental delays, or were born with an anatomical birth defect, like a cardiac or neural tube defect. Your partner will need to provide this information at her first preconception or prenatal visit, and your answers can help determine whether any specific prenatal tests are recommended or whether either of you should consider getting tested before you even start trying to conceive.

### Stock your fridge with healthy foods

If you thought you could continue mowing down chili dogs and cheese fries while your partner dines on grilled chicken and steamed vegetables, think again. Not only will it be easier for her if you follow the same [healthy eating lifestyle](http://www.babycenter.com/0_dads-to-be-diet-changes-to-boost-your-fertility_4188.bc), your sperm will be better off, too.

Studies have shown that poor nutrition can affect the quality and quantity of sperm. For example, men with low levels of folic acid – the same B vitamin women need to reduce the risk of neural tube birth defects – were found to have low sperm counts.

You may be able to get the amount you need (400 micrograms a day) from fortified breakfast cereals, leafy greens, legumes, and orange juice. Just to be sure, it can't hurt to take a folic acid supplement or a multivitamin, says Cole. Other fertility experts recommend vitamins that contain antioxidants or amino acids, such as L-arginine, for men with low sperm counts or poor sperm function.

Zinc is another nutrient to keep an eye on. Several studies show that even short-term zinc deficiencies can reduce semen volume and testosterone levels. Plus, research suggests that low levels of this mineral may interfere with the absorption and metabolism of folic acid. Eating meat, seafood, wholegrain cereals, and eggs are great ways to get the 11 milligrams of zinc you need each day, and most multivitamins also contain the mineral.

Some studies suggest that certain antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, can boost sperm motility. But before you reach for the supplements, check with your doctor. Too much C and E may damage your sperm's DNA. Your best bet is to eat a healthy diet that includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy.

Eating a healthy diet can help you maintain a healthy weight, too. Being overweight has been linked to lower testosterone, poor sperm quality, and reduced fertility. One study found that the odds of infertility increased by 10 percent for every 20 pounds of excess weight.

### Just say no to partying

The party's over for your partner once you start trying for a baby, but what about you? Same goes for men, says Cole. Sperm is just as affected by tobacco, alcohol, and drugs as a woman's eggs.

Research suggests that this troublesome trio may lower sperm counts and slow motility. That means you should completely cut out recreational drugs (such as marijuana and cocaine), cut down on alcohol, and quit smoking before you start trying.

Plus, kicking the habit now can help your family later. Secondhand smoke is not only dangerous for your partner it's also dangerous for your children – both in utero and after birth. Even using chewing tobacco has been linked to poor sperm function.

A lowered sperm count isn't the only reason you should cut back on drinking: Research shows

that dads who drink the equivalent of two drinks a day during the month before conception have babies who weigh, on average, 6.5 ounces less than other babies. Low birth weight is a serious medical condition that can affect your child's health and behavior for the rest of his life.

### Check your workplace for hazards

Other hidden dangers to sperm may be lurking where you work. Regular exposure to pesticides and other chemicals such as organic solvents, which are often found in dry cleaning and auto shops, can make it more difficult to conceive. They also can alter sperm composition, leading to birth defects and premature delivery.

Because it takes three months for sperm to develop and fully mature, limit your exposure to these chemicals at least three months before you and your partner start trying to conceive. Ask your employer for a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) that details any chemical exposure you have at work. And visit the Centers for Disease Control's [website](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/malrepro.html) for more information on how to avoid workplace hazards that can harm your reproductive health.

### Meet with a financial adviser

Shelling out $20 for cute designer baby booties is just the start of what you'll spend on your little one in years to come. According to a 2010 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, families earning between $57,600 and $99,730 will spend about $226,920 to raise a child from birth through age 17 – and that doesn't adjust for inflation.

Find out how much you're likely to spend with our [Cost of Raising a Child Calculator](http://www.babycenter.com/childCostCalc.htm).

But never fear: By investing just $50 or $100 a month, you can create a nice nest egg by the time your little one heads off to college. Talk to a financial adviser about how to start saving now.

### Buy some boxers

The jury is still out on the boxers versus briefs debate. Some say the testes can get overheated in briefs, inhibiting sperm production. Others say it's really not an issue unless sperm count is already a concern.

Cole points out that if wearing boxers can potentially give you an edge over briefs, why not go with boxers for a few months? It's a fairly simple wardrobe adjustment that could speed things along.

### Stay out of the hot tub

Don't use hot tubs, saunas, or hot baths to unwind for up to three months before trying to conceive. Heat kills sperm. And because it can take that long for sperm to regenerate, spending a long time in the hot tub in January means it could be April before you have a full set of swimmers again. Testicles function best when they keep their cool: "The boys" are happiest at 94 to 96 degrees, a couple of degrees cooler than normal body temperature.

### Be bike-savvy

Casual cyclists don't need to stress about the studies that found long hours on a hard bike seat can lead to lower semen volume and reduced sperm count and motility. It's the hard-core athlete who spends more than two hours a day, six days a week in the saddle who should take note: All that riding can injure the scrotum and testes, potentially leading to fertility problems.

What's more, wearing bike shorts for hours on end can kill sperm as effectively as soaking in a hot tub. The scrotal area can also get hot and sweaty when it's between the legs and bike seat, and that can lead to lower sperm counts in avid cyclists. Men's testes are outside the body for a reason – they need a cooler environment to function properly.

If you're going to ride, limit your time on the bike, wear loose-fitting shorts, and choose the softest seat available.

### Relax

Although the possibility of getting your partner pregnant is wildly exciting, it can also be stressful, especially if conception takes several months. Take time to relax and unwind – go for a swim, shoot some hoops, or take a stroll. Studies haven't concluded that such exercises will boost your conception odds, but it will certainly make the process more pleasant, says psychologist Alice Domar, assistant professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive biology at Harvard Medical School.