



Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service  
Division of Gynaecology



Manchester University  
NHS Foundation Trust

# HEALTHY LIVING – PREPARING FOR FERTILITY TREATMENT

Most people would benefit from improving their health, particularly couples who are trying to have a baby. A healthy lifestyle can improve your fertility and can also increase your chances of successful assisted conception treatment.

How can we improve our health and fitness before treatment is commonly asked question, so we have put together some advice for both men and women to help you improve your health and fitness.

## STOP SMOKING

The most important thing you can do if you smoke is - give up!

We know this is easier said than done but many research studies have shown the harmful effects of smoking on sperm quality, egg quality and implantation rates for fertilised eggs.

Smoking affects many aspects of your general health such as increased risk of cancer, heart disease, lung disease and premature ageing.

Passive smoking can affect partners and other people.

Smoking is an expensive way to damage your health!

If you need help to give up smoking, try the following for support:

- 'Quitline' on 0800 002200.
- Your GP or Practice Nurse.
- 'Fag Ends' on (0151) 261 0202.



## VAPING

Vaping (the use of e-cigarettes) is widely advertised as safer than cigarette smoking. The battery-operated electronic E-cigarettes heat nicotine (extracted from tobacco), flavourings and other chemicals including Propylene Glycol to create an aerosol that you inhale.

Recent animal studies have shown that E-cigarettes, even when nicotine free, include many harmful substances that disturb the hormonal balance and reduce the implantation of embryo in women. It also negatively affects the structure and function of the sperms in men. There is a risk that Vaping causes harm to fertility and during pregnancy.

**Integrated care boards (ICBs) have advised that, you must be non-smoking and not using any product containing nicotine (including E Cigarettes) in order to access any NHS funded fertility treatment and must continue to be non-smoking throughout treatment.**

## ACHIEVE A HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT

A healthy weight for height is referred to as a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI). You can check your BMI using the enclosed chart. It is important that you are both as near to your ideal BMI as possible.

Being overweight or underweight can cause general health problems but can also affect your fertility.

Aim for a BMI of between 21 and 30 (ideally 21 to 25).

If you need help achieving your ideal weight, then contact your GP for a referral to a dietitian.

Note: Healthy weight loss is a slow, gradual process. As you wait for your treatment – use this time wisely.

A loss of 1-2 lb (0.5-1.0 kg) per week is adequate.

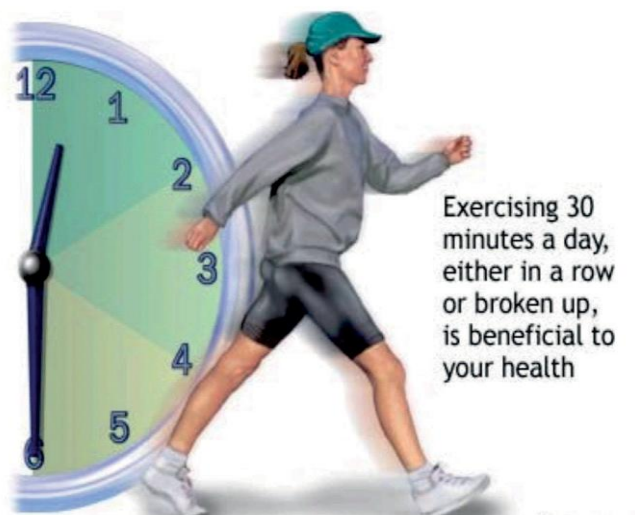
## TAKE REGULAR EXERCISE

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.

You do not need to join an expensive club or buy lots of equipment to get enough exercise. A brisk twenty-minute walk two to three times per week can be beneficial.

Using stairs instead of using lifts/escalators and walking to the shops can all make a difference and will improve your fitness.



## REDUCE ALCOHOL INTAKE

Excessive alcohol reduces fertility and 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!

However, people trying for a baby should limit alcohol intake to no more than 6 units per week. Ideally people should avoid alcohol completely.



## 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 cycles, we will suggest that you avoid caffeine altogether.



## FOLLOW A HEALTHY EATING PLAN

- Eat regular meals.
- Eat similar foods to the rest of the family.
- Enjoy your food.
- Eat a wide variety of different foods.

### WHY IS HEALTHY EATING IMPORTANT?

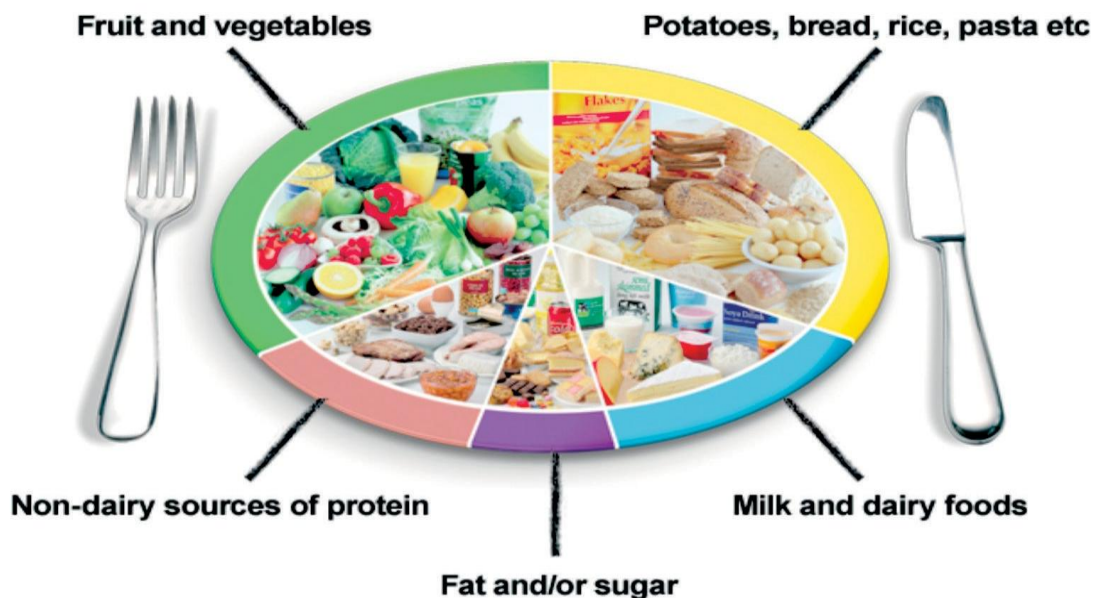
It helps you to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

It ensures your body has sufficient vitamins and minerals – essential for people trying to conceive.

It ensures your body has enough energy for all your daily activities.

The picture below shows the proportions of food from each food group, as we should eat them daily:

### The eatwell plate



### 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 fruit tinned in syrup).

### Example of a portion are:

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

## **FILL UP ON STARCHY FOODS**

This includes bread, cereals, and potatoes.

Try wholegrain varieties where possible, for example, 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, and yoghurt 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 such as sweets, chocolate, biscuits, burgers, cakes, crisps, and pastries contain lots of fat and sugar. 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**

It is strongly recommended that women take 400µg of folic acid per day, for 3 months before pregnancy and until 12 weeks after you conceive.

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

## **DO I NEED TO TAKE OTHER SUPPLEMENTS**

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

## **WANT TO KNOW MORE?**

Ask your GP to refer you to a State Registered Dietitian, or you can contact the 'Eating for Pregnancy' Helpline on: (0114) 242 4084.

# IMPROVING SPERM QUALITY

## THE EFFECT OF HEAT:

The normal activity of the sperm producing tubules in the testes is affected by heat. Intermittent overheating of the testes leads to a reduction in sperm production and/or a decrease in sperm activity (motility). The testes are situated in the scrotum mainly because it is cooler there than inside the body cavity. The testes have their own heat regulating mechanism so that in cold conditions the scrotum contracts, pulling the testes closer to the body, whereas in hot conditions the testes hang much lower.

### **Overheating of the testes can be caused in various ways:**

- Soaking in hot baths.
- Working in a high environmental temperature.
- Jacuzzis or saunas.
- Wearing tight or support underwear.

In addition, illness associated with fever temporarily reduces fertility.

Remember that sperm take 70 days to develop from their cells of origin, thus any episode of testicular overheating could affect your fertility for over two months.

### **To improve your fertility, you should:**

- Avoid hot baths, jacuzzi and saunas and change to having showers or lukewarm baths.
- Wear non-support, non-insulating cotton boxer shorts.

There is some evidence to suggest that in some cases the taking of zinc and vitamin E can improve sperm quality.

### **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 your nurse/doctor.

# COPING WITH STRESS

We know from couples undergoing infertility 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 common and distressing symptoms such as:

- Inability to sleep / sleeplessness.
- Tiredness.
- Anxiety.
- Inability to concentrate for long.
- Being touchy and irritable.
- 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 employ 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, books, videos.
- Stress management courses – night school, information from GPs, libraries etc.
- Support – building your own network using friends, family, counsellors.

Counselling is available at the Reproductive Medicine Unit, whilst you are on the waiting list also during and after treatment, should you require it. For further information or to arrange an appointment please contact the counselling service via our reception.

We want you to feel able to give treatment its best chance of success. Using positive coping mechanisms to deal with stress may help you to do it.

The information provided in this leaflet is not intended to replace verbal communication with medical or nursing staff.

## CONTACT DETAILS



0161 276 6000 (Option 6)



<https://www.mft.nhs.uk/saint-marys/services/gynaecology/reproductive-medicine/>