

Merck Foundation 'More Than a Mother'

Infertility is **NOT** a **STIGMA**

Message to All Women: Infertility affects Men and Women equally

Remember: You are More than a Mother



- In sub-Saharan Africa, infection is the cause of infertility in up to 85% of women seeking infertility care, compared to 33% worldwide.⁽¹⁾



In Africa, some traditional, cultural and religious practices, combined with low resource environment are thought to be associated with higher levels of non-genetic and preventable causes of infertility such as:^(1,2)

- **Poor nutrition**
- **Untreated sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)**
- **Unsafe abortions**
- **Consequence of infections caused by the practice of female genital mutilation**
- **Exposure to smoking, leaded petrol and other environmental pollutants**

Untreated infections can lead to infertility - Have regular checkup and see the doctor early if you feel unwell.

Health Facts :

Besides the negative impact that **HIV** has on your body's immunity, it can also affect your body's ability to produce hormones required to fall pregnant, or lead to early menopause - the stage when monthly periods stop and you cannot fall pregnant⁽³⁾

In women, STDs such as **Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea** may have few or no symptoms. Left untreated, these 'silent infections' can result in pelvic inflammatory disease - a condition that can cause serious complications such as chronic pelvic pain, ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the womb) and infertility^(4,5)



Both Men and Women should practice "Safe Sex" and avoid risky behaviour that can lead to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as Chlamydia. STDs can cause serious complications including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), blockage of fallopian tubes, ectopic pregnancy and prostatitis, which can subsequently cause infertility.^(4,5)

1. Ombelet W. Global access to infertility care in developing countries: a case of human rights, equity and social justice. Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn 2011;3(4):257-266.
2. Hammarberg K, Kirkman M. Infertility in resource-constrained settings: moving towards Amelioration. Reproductive BioMedicine 2013;26:189-195.
3. Kushnir VA, Lewis W. Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and infertility: emerging problems in the era of highly active antiretrovirals. Fertil Steril 2011;96:546-53.
4. Sexually Transmitted Diseases: STDs and infertility. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [internet] 2016 Oct 18. [cited 2019 Aug 08]; Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/infertility/default.htm>
5. What is the link between sexually transmitted diseases or sexually transmitted infections (STDs/STIs) and infertility? Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [internet] 2016. [cited 2019 Aug 08]; Available from: <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/stds/conditioninfo/Pages/infertility.aspx>

#MenToo #NoToInfertilityStigma

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For women, a number of strategies may help increase the chances of becoming pregnant:

Exercise moderately

Regular exercise is important, but if you are exercising so intensely that your periods are infrequent or absent, your fertility (ability to fall pregnant) may be impaired.⁽¹⁻³⁾



Eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight

Being underweight or overweight can affect your hormone production or result in disturbances in your monthly periods, which can cause infertility⁽¹⁻³⁾



Quit smoking

Tobacco has multiple negative effects on fertility, not to mention your general health and the health of your unborn baby.

If you smoke and are considering pregnancy, **quit now**⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

Avoid alcohol and "street" drugs

These substances may impair your ability to conceive and have a healthy pregnancy. Don't drink alcohol or use illegal drugs⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾



Avoid industrial & environmental toxins

such as pesticides and heavy metals found in large fish and stockfish⁽⁴⁾



Limit caffeine

Women trying to get pregnant may want to limit caffeine intake. Ask your doctor for guidance on safe use of caffeine⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾



Avoid or reduce stress⁽⁵⁾

1. Optimizing natural fertility fact sheet [internet]. American Society of Reproductive Medicine; 2015 [cited 2020 Jan 9]. Available from: https://www.reproductivefacts.org/globalassets/rf/news-and-publications/bookletsfact-sheets/english-fact-sheets-and-info-booklets/optimizing_natural_fertility_factsheet.pdf

2. Weight and fertility fact sheet [internet]. American Society of Reproductive Medicine; 2015 [cited 2020 Jan 9]. Available from: https://www.reproductivefacts.org/globalassets/rf/news-and-publications/bookletsfact-sheets/english-fact-sheets-and-info-booklets/weight_and_fertility_factsheet.pdf

4. Will toxins in the environment affect my ability to have children? Fact sheet [internet]. American Society of Reproductive Medicine; 2014 [cited 2020 Jan 9]. Available from: https://www.reproductivefacts.org/globalassets/rf/news-and-publications/bookletsfact-sheets/english-fact-sheets-and-info-booklets/will_toxins_in_the_environment_affect_my_ability_to_have_children_factsheet.pdf

5. Stress and infertility fact sheet [internet]. American Society of Reproductive Medicine; 2014 [cited 2020 Jan 9]. Available from: https://www.reproductivefacts.org/globalassets/rf/news-and-publications/bookletsfact-sheets/english-fact-sheets-and-info-booklets/stress_and_infertility_factsheet.pdf

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