

The Good Egg...Everything You Need to Know About Ovulation

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Ovulation is perhaps the single most important factor when trying to conceive. Women who have infrequent, irregular, or no ovulation (anovulation) will find that conceiving is either very difficult or downright impossible.

Understanding Ovulation

Ovulation is when a mature egg is released from the ovary and makes its way through the fallopian tube in anticipation of fertilization. Hormones have already prepared the lining of the uterus for the potential pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur, the egg and the lining of the uterus are expelled through menstruation and the ovulation process occurs again.

Important Ovulation Facts

- The egg lives 12-24 hours after leaving the ovary
- Typically only one egg is released during ovulation, but more than one can occur and if fertilized results in twins, triplets or higher, although the latter are more rare
- Ovulation can be negatively affected by illness, weight, medications, and stress
- Some women experience pain (known as mittelschmerz or “middle pain” in German) or light spotting during ovulation
- Each woman is born with all the eggs she will ever have and as she ages the quality and quantity diminish
- Ovulation can occur even if the menstrual cycle has not occurred
- A woman’s monthly cycle is measured from the first day of her menstrual period until the first day of her next period. On average, a woman’s cycle is between 28 to 32 days

Hormones: The Secret Ingredient

The follicular phase is the first part of the ovulation cycle. This phase starts the first day of the last menstrual period (LMP) and continues to ovulation. This first half can differ from woman to woman lasting anywhere from 7 days to 30 days.

The luteal phase is the second, and probably the most important half of ovulation cycles. The luteal phase is typically only 12-16 days from the day of ovulation. This means that the day of ovulation will determine how long a woman’s cycle is. While stress can affect the menstrual cycle, stress around the time of the expected period will not make it last as one’s period was already determined weeks earlier!

Can I Conceive?

Statistically a healthy couple of reproductive age has about a 20% chance of conceiving once per month. The woman's age affects these odds significantly.

Couples ask how soon they can try to conceive after stopping birth control pills and the answer is right way although conception may still take several months.

If you're interested in becoming pregnant, have a thorough check-up by your Ob/Gyn. It's also important to maintain healthy behaviors like eating a lower-fat diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, refrain or stop smoking, get regular exercise, and keep your weight within normal limits. Above all, remember to be patient as the process can take up to one year and still be considered normal.

Should I be Concerned?

While most couples succeed after a few months, others will wait longer. Most couples wonder when is the time to seek help from a fertility specialist and the rule of thumb is:

- Couples 34 years and younger after one year of regular, unprotected intercourse and no pregnancy;
- Couples 35 years and older after six months of regular, unprotected intercourse and no pregnancy;
- And couples of any age with an existing medical or surgical history that can affect their fertility.

While infertility issues impact men and women equally, ovulation problems are the single most likely cause for female infertility. When this happens or is suspected, a woman's Ob/Gyn may place them on clomiphene citrate or Clomid™ depending on her age. If after a course or two of Clomid, a consultation with a board certified reproductive endocrinologist is in order.

It is important for couples struggling to have a baby to know that pregnancy is conceivable with the help of fertility specialists like Drs. Daneshmand or Shapiro. If you suspect a problem, call our office. We'd be happy to assist you!

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