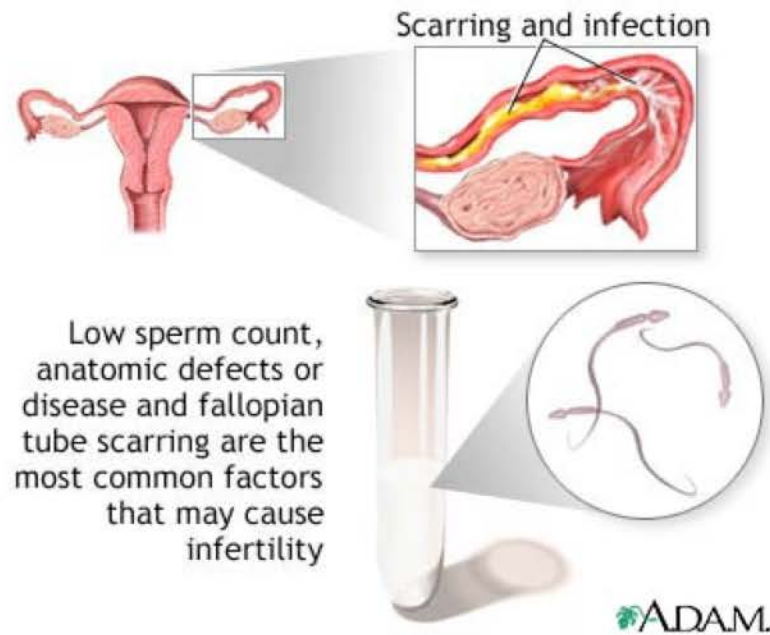


## infertility

### Primary infertility



Primary infertility is a term used to describe a couple that has never been able to conceive a pregnancy after a minimum of 1 year of attempting to do so through unprotected intercourse. Causes of infertility include a wide range of physical as well as emotional factors.

#### Alternative names [Return to top](#)

Barren; Inability to conceive; Unable to get pregnant

#### Definition [Return to top](#)

Infertility is the inability of a couple to achieve a [pregnancy](#) after 12 months of unprotected intercourse.

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Primary infertility is the term used to describe a couple that has never been able to conceive a [pregnancy](#), after a minimum of 1 year of attempting to do so through unprotected intercourse. Secondary infertility is the term used to describe couples who have previously been [pregnant](#) at least once, but have not been able to achieve another pregnancy.

Causes of infertility include a wide range of physical as well as emotional factors. Approximately 30% to 40% of all infertility is due to a "male" factor, such as [retrograde ejaculation](#), [impotence](#), hormone deficiency, environmental pollutants, scarring from sexually transmitted disease, or decreased [sperm count](#). Some factors affecting sperm count are heavy [marijuana](#) use or prescription drugs, such as cimetidine, spironolactone, and nitrofurantoin.

A "female" factor (for example, scarring from sexually transmitted disease or endometriosis, ovulation dysfunction, poor nutrition, hormone imbalance, ovarian [cysts](#), pelvic infection, [tumor](#), or transport system abnormality from the [cervix](#) through the fallopian tubes) is responsible for 40% to 50% of infertility in couples. The remaining 10% to 30% may be caused by contributing factors in both partners, or no cause can be adequately identified.

It is estimated that 10% to 20% of couples will be unable to conceive after 1 year of attempting to become pregnant. It is important that pregnancy be attempted for an extended period (at least 1 year). The chances for pregnancy occurring in healthy couples who are both under the age of 30, having intercourse regularly, is only 25% to 30% per month. A woman's peak fertility is in her early 20s. As a woman ages beyond 35 (and particularly after age 40), the likelihood of conceiving is less than 10% per month.

In addition to age-related factors, increased risk for infertility is associated with having:

- Multiple sexual partners (therefore increasing the risk for STDs)
- A sexually transmitted disease
- A past history of [PID \(pelvic inflammatory disease\)](#) (after a single episode, 10% to 15% of women may become infertile)
- A past history of [orchitis](#) or [epididymitis](#) (men)
- [Mumps](#) (men)
- A [varicocele](#) (men)
- A past medical history that includes DES exposure (men or women)
- [Eating disorders](#) (women)
- [Anovulatory](#) menstrual cycles
- Endometriosis
- Abnormalities of the uterus (myomas) or cervical obstruction
- A [chronic](#) disease (such as [diabetes](#))

### **Symptoms** [Return to top](#)

- Inability to become [pregnant](#).
- A range of emotional reactions by either or both members of the couple related to childlessness. (In general, such reactions are greater among childless couples. Having a single child tends to blunt the depth of emotional problems.)

### **Signs and tests** [Return to top](#)

A complete history and [physical examination](#) of both partners is essential.

Tests may include:

- [Semen analysis](#) to evaluate ejaculate. The specimen is collected after 2 to 3 days of complete abstinence to determine volume and viscosity of semen and [sperm count](#), motility, swimming speed, and shape.
- Measuring basal body temperature -- taking the woman's temperature each morning before arising in an effort to note the 0.4 to 1.0 degree Fahrenheit temperature increase associated with presumptive ovulation.
- Monitoring cervical mucus changes throughout the menstrual cycle to note the wet, stretchy, and slippery mucus associated with the ovulatory phase.
- Postcoital test (PCT) -- to evaluate sperm-cervical mucus interaction through analysis of cervical mucus collected 2 to 8 hours after the couple has intercourse.

- Measuring [serum progesterone](#) (blood test).
- [Endometrial biopsy](#).
- [Testicular biopsy](#) (rarely done).
- Measuring urinary [luteinizing hormone](#) by using kits commercially available for home use to predict ovulation and assist with timing of intercourse.
- Progestin challenge -- with sporadic or absent ovulation.
- Serum hormonal levels (blood tests) for either or both partners.
- [Hysterosalpingography](#) (HSG) -- X-ray procedure done with contrast dye that enables evaluation of potential transport from the [cervix](#) through the uterus and fallopian tubes.
- [Laparoscopy](#) to allow direct visualization of the pelvic cavity.
- Pelvic exam (women) to determine if there are [cysts](#).

**Treatment** [Return to top](#)