

# 5 simple steps to protect your fertility



## Don't leave it too late

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Plan to start your family by the time the female partner is in her late 20s or early thirties. Women's fertility begins to decline significantly from the age of 35 and very dramatically from 38 because female eggs are only of good quality and high fertility until that age. Most couples envisage having more than one child, so leave yourself enough time. Of course you may have to wait to find someone with whom you want to have a child but don't put things off because of money, travel or career. From your career point of view, no time is a good time for having babies, so why wait and risk missing out altogether.

## Don't smoke

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Smoking reduces both male and female fertility. If one partner smokes, the success rate of IVF is reduced by 20%. Other drugs such as marijuana and cocaine have an even more detrimental effect – particularly on sperm quantity and quality.

## Practice safe sex

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Protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea by always using condoms. It is estimated that 1 in 10 Irish women between the ages of 16 and 22 have been infected with Chlamydia. This is usually a silent infection with no symptoms. One episode of Chlamydia gives you a 25% chance of having blocked or damaged Fallopian tubes.

## Keep your weight in the normal range

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Women who are overweight have lower fertility. Getting back to a normal weight will result in pregnancy for 50% of such women. This is particularly true for women with polycystic ovaries but applies to all. Being overweight also makes fertility treatment less successful and associated with more complications. Indeed being overweight in pregnancy is detrimental to you and to your baby.

On the other hand, being underweight or exercising excessively reduces your fertility and can lead to early osteoporosis.

## Consult your family doctor

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If you think you may have a gynaecological, sperm or sexual problem, contact your family doctor/GP who will diagnose and treat this or refer you, if necessary, to a specialist in this area. Women should take particular note if they have a family history (in mother or sister) of endometriosis, polycystic ovaries or early menopause. Men should report any changes in their testicles. If you are concerned re sexual difficulties, don't be embarrassed – speak to a professional such as your GP.