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life

# Failing to conceive? Don't blame woman

- ▶ One in seven couples have trouble conceiving, half of them because of faulty sperm.
- ▶ Now doctors have even developed an at-home sperm test kit.

## Up and down

### What dads-to-be should eat

Eat plenty of whole-grains. They're a good source of magnesium, which may help prevent sperm from sticking together. They should also increase their fruit and vegetable intake from five to eight portions per day. Oily fish like sardines and anchovies help the sperm swim faster.



### What to avoid

Drinking more than one cup of coffee per day decreases fertility by 50 per cent, as does consuming more than five units of alcohol per week. The decrease has been shown as the partners taking twice as long to fall pregnant.

DIETITIAN TYNONE BISHOP-WHITE



▶ Professor John Herr, director of the Center of Contraceptive and Reproductive Health at the University of Virginia, examining sperm.



ELISABETH  
BRAW

METRO WORLD NEWS

Michael Opsahl spends most days talking about sperms and erections. The Seattle gynecologist helps couples who can't conceive because of the husband's poor sperm.

"Couples come into my office and think the problem is the woman's fallopian tubes, but when I examine them I often discover that the man's sperm is as bad as the woman's tubes", says Opsahl.

"Forty per cent of infertility cases can be attributed to men. I tell my patients that making a baby is a team sport. But some feel that having their sperm checked is a threat to their masculinity."

Some five per cent of men have such poor sperm that they require medical help. A typical man has 20-100 million sperm per milliliter of semen, but men with fewer than five mil-



▶ Dr. Michael Opsahl with a patient.

**"I tell my patients that making a baby is a team sport. But some feel that having their sperm checked is a threat to their masculinity."** DR. MICHAEL OPSAHL

lion sperms per milliliter have poor chances of conceiving.

Conception is also affected if the sperms swim slowly or are of poor quality.

"But in 90 per cent of the cases, the problem is low sperm count", explains Professor John Herr,

director of the Center of Contraceptive and Reproductive Health at the University of Virginia.

"If a man has less than five million sperms per milliliter, it affects his ability to conceive."

Many different factors are to blame: extreme sports, hot baths and

saunas, radiation, toxins, and alcohol.

"Alcoholics can have babies, too," notes Opsahl. "But alcohol kills sperm. I've had several couples where the gave up alcohol and his wife promptly got pregnant."

Because sperm wander down to the testicles, where they're more exposed to the temperature outside the body, even changing underwear can make a man more fertile.

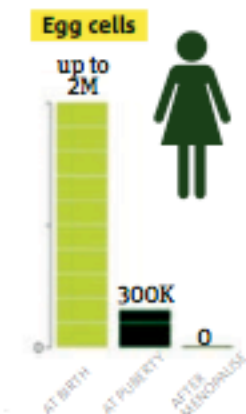
Men wishing for babies should wear boxers instead of briefs. While your at it, keep that warm lap-top off your lap.

Men whose sperm fails to fertilize their wives' eggs are initially recommended to change their lifestyles.

If they still don't conceive, doctors can harvest their sperm and artificially inseminate an egg.

"When it comes to conceiving, medical technology is men's friend," says Opsahl.

"I always tell men that poor-quality sperm has



nothing to do with their sexuality. The only men we can't help are the ones who have no sperm at all."

Still, having a doctor examine one's sperm can be humiliating.

That's why Herr's team has developed a sperm test, called SpermCheck, that allows couples to check the man's sperm on their own.

SpermCheck functions the same way as a home-pregnancy test. It recognizes protein that's part of the sperm-head but doesn't exist anywhere else in the body.

Using SpermCheck, couples can find out whether the man reaches thresholds of five million and 20 million sperms per milliliter.

"Now couples can test their fertility in the privacy of their homes," explains Herr.

"And remember that in many countries infertility is a cause for divorce. This test can lead to greater gender equality around the world."