Ovulation and pregnancy

Conceptions and misconceptions
For many people, having a baby and creating a family is the greatest achievement of their lives. So it’s not uncommon for them to plan their families carefully, waiting until the time is just right to fall pregnant.

Most couples assume that once they stop using contraception, pregnancy will happen quickly. In fact, about 85 per cent of couples do conceive in the first year.

To women and couples who are having problems conceiving, it can feel like failure and seem that they’re alone in experiencing these difficulties in getting pregnant. But, the reality is that this happens much more often than people realise. At some point in their lives, at least 1 in 6 couples will experience some degree of infertility.

Traditionally, infertility has been defined as “the inability of couples to achieve conception after a year of unprotected intercourse, or the inability to carry a pregnancy to term”.

If you’ve been trying to get pregnant for 12 months (or 6 months for women over the age of 35), assisted conception might be needed.

Genea is here to help. Visit genea.com.au to request your free information pack or speak to our Fertility Advisor about your next steps.

Timing intercourse
While sperm can survive for 3 or 4 days inside a woman’s reproductive tract, it only takes the egg between 12 and 24 hours to make its way through the fallopian tube after ovulation. The best chance of conception comes when a couple have intercourse 1 to 2 days before ovulation and 1 day after.

A woman typically ovulates 14 days before her period. If a woman has a regular cycle length of 28 days, she will ovulate mid-cycle - 14 days after day 1 of her period. If the cycle is longer, say 34 days, ovulation occurs around 20 days after day 1 of a period - not mid-cycle.

Using this calculation will tell you when the best chance of conception will be. You can also access Genea’s ovulation calculator online.

Some women know when they are ovulating from changes in their body and the way they feel. Some typical indicators are breast soreness, heavier and more opaque vaginal discharge, tightness in the abdomen.

Many others have no noticeable symptoms.

Basal body temperature (BBT)
Two days after ovulation, your temperature rises slightly - around 1/4 to 1/2 a degree. While this is not necessarily useful for that particular cycle, recording your temperature every morning for a few months can show if your cycle is regular, and help predict your best day for conception.

If you are looking for more information, there are any number of websites dedicated to BBT tracking. Just remember that it is a useful indication, rather than an exact science.

Regular intercourse
Knowing that sperm can survive inside a woman for a number of days, if a couple is having regular sex (2 to 3 times a week) there is a good chance that there will be some sperm there to meet your egg when it arrives.

It is a myth that men should “store” their sperm by abstaining from sex. Long periods of abstinence can lead to a decrease in sperm quality. Our best advice is to have sex 2 or 3 times a week, no matter where a woman is in her cycle.

Urine based ovulation kits
Urine based ovulation kits detect the LH surge (see graph on next page) that occurs in a woman’s body before ovulation begins, helping you to work out the best time for intercourse. Ovulation generally occurs 24 to 48 hours after the LH surge.

Most urine kits are relatively inexpensive and they can be purchased at pharmacies, online or at some doctors offices.

There are many brands available and they vary in price, the number of tests contained in each kit and amount of time and steps necessary to complete each test. All kits can be used in the privacy of your own home.
How they work
Ovulation prediction kits work by indicating the level of luteinising hormone (LH) in a woman’s urine. LH is present throughout the menstrual cycle, but increases significantly 24 to 36 hours prior to ovulation. This rapid increase is called the LH surge. By identifying the LH surge with the help of an ovulation kit, a couple can then time intercourse.

The menstrual cycle

The age factor
As you can see by the graph below, by age 36 a woman’s chances of conceiving per month is decreased by nearly half. The downward slope continues until by age 45 where the average natural fertility rate per month is approximately 1 per cent.

Getting it right
Pregnancy is a complicated process that depends on many factors:

- The production of healthy sperm by the man and healthy eggs by the woman;
- Unblocked fallopian tubes that allow the sperm to reach the egg;
- The sperm’s ability to fertilise the egg when they meet;
- A genetically healthy embryo; and
- The ability of the embryo to implant in the uterus.

Repeatedly encountering difficulty at any of these steps can lead to infertility. The reality is that human reproduction is a fairly inefficient process. In 1 cycle for the average fertile couple, the chance of fertilisation from any particular meeting of egg and sperm can be about 80 per cent, but by the time of the expected menstrual period roughly half of the early embryos have already failed to develop or implant.

Some embryos will implant, but are fundamentally abnormal and are unable to survive. In fact, the menstrual period might not even be delayed and the couple may not realise that an early pregnancy has been lost. If a menstrual period is missed, a 1/4 or more of the remaining embryos can still fail later.

Various clinical studies have calculated the chance of pregnancy among population groups who do not use contraception, and indicate that the probability of a live birth after exposure in any 1 month averages about 1 in 5, or a 20 per cent chance.