

Medicines That Affect Male Fertility

What you need to know if you want to have children

This handout lists medicines and drugs that can reduce fertility in men.

What Can Help

The American Society of Reproductive Medicine states that a man's sperm production and fertility are best if he is a normal body weight and eats a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, which are rich in antioxidants.

UWMC Men's Health Center also recommends that men take a daily multi-vitamin and omega-3 supplement to help with fertility issues.

What to Avoid

If you are trying to conceive a baby, most medicines are safe for you to take. But, some can affect your ability to conceive.

The drugs listed in this handout may reduce sperm *count* (the number of sperm), sperm *motility* (ability to move), or sperm *morphology* (shape). Some of these medicines may also affect sexual function or the hormones that are involved in sexual and reproductive function.

Tobacco, Alcohol, and Recreational Drugs

Using tobacco, taking recreational drugs such as marijuana or anabolic steroids, and drinking a lot of alcohol are linked with decreased fertility. While you are trying to conceive:

- Avoid smoking cigarettes and using other tobacco products.
- Do not use marijuana or any other recreational drugs.
- Drink less than 1 or 2 alcoholic drinks a day.



Talk with your doctor about medicines you are taking if you are trying to conceive.

Testosterone

The hormone *testosterone* is often used to treat *hypogonadism* (low testosterone levels). But, infertility is a main side effect of this treatment.

Testosterone comes in many forms: gels, patches, intramuscular injections, and pellets. Some brand names for testosterone products are Androgel, Fortesta, and Axiron.

While you are trying to conceive, avoid products that contain testosterone. Talk with your doctor about other ways to treat your health concern. There are other hormone therapies that can both improve the symptoms of hypogonadism and increase sperm production.

Flomax (Tamsulosin)

Flomax (tamsulosin) is used to treat *benign prostatic hypertrophy* (BPH) and other urinary problems. But, this medicine may decrease a man's semen volume and/or cause *anejaculation* (not being able to ejaculate).

If you are taking tamsulosin, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Proscar and Propecia (Finasteride)

These medicines are used to treat male pattern baldness and BPH. They can also lower your *ejaculate volume* (how much ejaculate you create), sperm count, and sperm motility.

Studies show that stopping these drugs can improve ejaculate volume and sperm count and motility. If you are taking one of these medicines, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Psychiatric Medicines

Medicines called *tricyclic antidepressants* and *selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors* are often used to treat depression. Some of these are citalopram, fluoxetine, venlafaxine, paroxetine, sertraline, nortriptyline, and imipramine. These medicines can cause *sexual dysfunction*, such as lowered desire or arousal, delayed orgasm, and anejaculation. They have also been linked to lower sperm counts. If you are taking one of these medicines, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Opiates

Medicines called *opiates* are often prescribed to treat pain. But, studies show that opiates, even in low doses, can decrease sperm motility.

Using opiates in low doses and for a short time, such as after a minor surgery, should not have a major effect on your fertility or sexual function.

Higher doses of opiates can cause erectile dysfunction (ED), low libido, and problems producing sperm. These effects can be reversed when opiate use is stopped. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Calcium Channel Blockers

Medicines called *calcium channel blockers* are often used to treat high blood pressure and other heart problems. Two of these medicines are amlodipine and diltiazem.

The effects of calcium channel blockers on human fertility have not been studied. But, animal studies suggest that these medicines can decrease sperm count and motility. If you are taking one of these medicines, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Antibiotics

Some studies show that some antibiotics such as nitrofurantoin and erythromycin can block *spermatogenesis* (sperm production). But, other studies show improved sperm counts after taking antibiotics.

Normal doses of antibiotics, taken for a short time, appear to be safe. But long-term daily use can affect fertility. If you are taking antibiotics, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Sulfasalazine and Infliximab

Sulfasalazine and infliximab are drugs that are often used to treat Crohn's disease, inflammatory bowel disease, and ulcerative colitis. These medicines may decrease sperm motility or morphology. Stopping these medicines can improve sperm quality within 2 to 3 months. If you are taking one of these medicines, there may be other ways to treat your health concern. Be sure to talk with your doctor before you stop taking any prescription medicine.

Chemotherapy

Many chemotherapy drugs damage the cells that produce sperm and may cause *azoospermia* (no sperm in ejaculate) right after treatment. A man may or may not regain the ability to make sperm after having chemotherapy. This will depend on which chemotherapy drug is used, what dose was given, and how long treatment lasts.

We recommend that men who hope to have children try to *cryopreserve* their sperm before beginning chemotherapy, if possible. With this technique, sperm are frozen for later use with *artificial reproductive technology* (ART).

If you are going to start chemotherapy, talk with your doctor about sperm cryopreservation before your first treatment.

To Learn More

If you have any questions or concerns about any medicines you are taking and how they affect your fertility, please call UWMC Men's Health Center at 206-598-6358.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Men's Health Center:
206-598-6358