

How to improve your semen quality

At Cambridge IVF, your health and emotional well-being is as important to us as that of your partner. In this leaflet, we provide evidence-based advice that you can implement right away to improve your chances for a successful pregnancy as well as gain a sense of control over this stressful time. Please do not hesitate to talk to our members of staff for more advice or concerns you may have.

1.) IS A HEALTHY DIET HELPFUL?

Although the scientific community is still working hard to define clear and effective dietary guidelines for men seeking fertility treatment, wide-scale research suggests that following a more balanced diet, such as the Mediterranean diet, can go a long way in improving your semen quality. Even more so, the Western-style diet has been consistently shown to have a negative effect on men's fertility. As such, high intakes of seafood, poultry, whole grains, nuts, skimmed milk, fruits, and vegetables are highly recommended. On the contrary, fatty and fried foods, red and processed meat, refined grains, heavily processed convenience foods, sweets and sweetened beverages are best to be avoided.



2.) ARE VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS WORTH TAKING?

Dietary supplements marketed as fertility boosters to men mostly contain antioxidants which have been previously linked to improved sperm parameters and pregnancy rates by a cohort of low-quality studies. More recently, evidence derived from two large-scale, well-designed clinical trials failed to support antioxidant supplementation as an effective treatment for male subfertility. As such, although the use of these supplements is not prohibited, they should not be used as a replacement for a healthy diet, or as the only means of dealing with any fertility issues you may be currently experiencing.



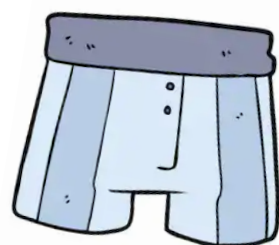
3.) WHAT ABOUT ALCOHOL OR SMOKING?

Although alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking are suspected risk factors for male subfertility, clear evidence is still lacking to support these habits as critical for your reproductive health. Nevertheless, most studies investigating the relationship between smoking and semen quality have concluded that, particularly among men with poor semen quality, moderate to heavy smoking can lead to even more pronounced semen abnormalities. Likewise, only chronic and/or excessive drinking has been clearly associated with adverse effects on semen quality. As such, you are advised to limit your alcohol consumption to no more than the government advised limit of 14 units of alcohol per week and to quit or abstain from smoking.



4.) BOXERS OR BRIEFS?

Although several studies have investigated whether men who wear tighter underwear have a poorer semen quality compared to those who wear looser underwear, results have been inconclusive. Nevertheless, choice of clothing along with other modifiable lifestyle factors, e.g. hot showers, use of saunas and prolonged time in sedentary positions, have all been long suspected to cause elevated testicular temperature which is in turn widely known to reduce sperm production. As such, you are advised to limit any behavior that might result in prolonged pressure or heat to your genital region as a cautionary step before and during your fertility treatment.



5.) HOW MUCH EXERCISE IS ENOUGH?

Although exercise is undoubtedly beneficial for your general health, its relationship with male fertility remains controversial. More specifically, recreational exercise of moderate intensity was suggested to improve reproductive health, particularly in men with poor semen quality, sedentary lifestyle and/or high BMI. On the contrary, highly strenuous exercise of extreme duration is suggested to increase the risk of poor semen quality and sexual dysfunction, with elite athletes being the most affected. It should be stressed here that image- and performance-enhancing use of anabolic steroids can have a detrimental effect on your sexual health, even leading to irreversible loss of sperm production. Instead, regular exercise in moderation and without any drug intervention is the scientific proven way to virility and reproductive success.



6.) IS STRESS A RISK FOR FERTILITY?

Stress is widespread in modern society and has taken its toll on people's well-being more than ever before. As a result, scientists have long suspected a link between psychological stress and reduced parameters of semen quality. Increasing evidence has particularly highlighted chronic and acute stress due to major life events as detrimental for male fertility. Most importantly, several studies have shown that high stress levels associated with infertility diagnosis and treatment can negatively affect semen quality and sabotage your best efforts to conceive. As such, please do not underestimate the importance of your emotional and psychological well-being in achieving your goal of having a baby. Taking measures to limit your stress levels as much as possible using techniques that work best for you can make a difference for your treatment.



ARE THESE CHANGES REALLY GOING TO HELP?

The process of spermatogenesis (sperm production) is cyclical and takes around 3 months to complete. Any positive changes you make will therefore not be seen immediately. You should therefore see this as a 'long game' and only make changes you feel are realistic and you can sustain for a long period of time. Fad dieting and short term changes will not be effective in improving your semen quality. Even with the best of intentions the improvements we see (if any) are not likely to be dramatic but by taking the time to make positive changes well in advance of your treatment process you are giving that treatment the very best chance of success.



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