



The role of exercise in improving fertility, quality of life and emotional wellbeing

Being in the healthy weight range reduces the risk of infertility and improves the chance of conceiving spontaneously and with assisted reproductive technology (ART). Exercise is a key component of managing weight. Here is what you need to know about the benefits of exercise for fertility, quality of life and emotional wellbeing.



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Recommendations for exercise

Australian and international guidelines recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, gardening or dancing, on most and preferably all days of the week. If possible, some vigorous activity, such as running, fast cycling or fast swimming, should also be performed every week.

For men and women who are overweight and obese exercise can help maintain weight or achieve a modest weight loss which improves general health and fertility. As part of weight management, guidelines recommend that overweight or obese adults perform 225 to 300 minutes moderate-intensity exercise every week (about 35 to 45 minutes per day).

How exercise can improve fertility and ART outcomes

Moderate regular exercise can improve fertility and the chance of having a baby with ART. Studies of the effects of exercise on fertility have found that vigorous exercise reduces the risk of ovulation problems and that moderate exercise decreases the risk of miscarriage and increases the chance of having a baby among women who undergo ART.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a complex condition which is associated with infertility. Women with PCOS often have irregular or no periods because they rarely ovulate. For overweight and obese women with PCOS regular exercise can increase the frequency of ovulation which leads to more regular menstrual cycles. As ovulation becomes more frequent, the chance of conceiving increases.

While studies show that exercise boosts female fertility it is important to note that a large amount of very high intensity exercise may actually reduce fertility and the chance of having a baby with ART. So, it's a good idea to avoid very high intensity exercise while trying for a baby.

Obesity in men can reduce sperm quality and fertility. Regular moderate exercise can help men lose weight or stay in the healthy weight range and thereby improve sperm quality. But, a large amount of high intensity exercise may be detrimental for sperm quality and should be avoided while trying to achieve pregnancy.

How exercise can improve quality of life and emotional wellbeing

Studies indicate that light or moderate intensity exercise improves quality of life and emotional wellbeing in healthy women and men. Among infertile women exercise, as part of a lifestyle improvement program, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression and improved self-esteem. In women with PCOS exercise improved health-related quality of life and reduced symptoms of depression and body image distress.

Finding time for exercise

Busy lives can make it hard to find time for exercise. Incorporating exercise in daily activities increases the chance of achieving the recommended physical activity goals. Whenever possible, walking or cycling rather than driving, taking the stairs rather than the lift, and getting off a tram or bus a stop or two before your final destination and walking the rest will help you get the exercise you need for good health and optimal fertility.

Main points to remember

- Any physical activity is better than no physical activity
- If you don't currently exercise, start with achievable goals and build up to the recommended levels over time
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day
- Use every day opportunities to increase physical activity
- Minimise the amount of time you spend sitting and if you have to sit for long periods, take a break and move around as often you can.

For more information about pre-conception health visit



www.yourfertility.org.au