

# Infertility & Weight

Being overweight or underweight could be causing you those fertility problems, like Polycystic Ovary Syndrome ...which is invariably stopping your chances of conceiving.

## A Weighty Issue

Before anyone even thinks about trying to fall pregnant there are a few simple things that need to be sorted out first. I've always talked about how emotions cause most of our problems, but there are a few other problems that, when combined with emotional issues, make our health far worse.

Are you overweight? Are you carrying several more kilos than you should? Are you underweight? Do you have a good diet? Do you exercise regularly? Is your health up to scratch? If you are **overweight**, your chances of falling pregnant are more than **halved** again. Similarly if you are **underweight**, your chances are equally **reduced**. Research has shown that when people have lost some weight, after having excess weight on, their chances of falling pregnant almost doubled.

## The Hard Line

It is always a hard topic to talk about as most people who are **overweight** already know they are. It is a bit of a viscous circle when trying to lose weight and the low self esteem of being overweight just adds to the whole thing. Nobody likes to be told that their weight is causing their health problems. Unfortunately, people do need to be told, because sometimes they are in denial.

## Health Risks

If you are overweight, it sad to say, but you are actually classed as unhealthy. Excess weight not only increases the pressure on your structure, but it also increases your risk if **cardiovascular disease** and many other health problems, such as **diabetes**. One of the biggest problem for people who are overweight and wanting to fall pregnant, is that many have **polycystic ovarian syndrome**.

I don't like to put people in a box, but research does show that most people with polycystic ovaries are overweight, have terrible diets and have elevated insulin levels, which cause the polycystic ovaries. Anyone with polycystic ovaries does have a more than 50% chance of developing diabetes later on as well.

Polycystic ovaries are directly caused by elevated insulin levels in the body. This directly relates to too many **carbohydrate foods** elevating blood sugar levels thus elevating insulin. A lot of it goes back to poor dietary habits that have been taught to us by our parents, excess saturated fats and worst of all...a sedentary lifestyle.

## Making Changes

The sad fact for most of us, is that when we leave school to go into the work force or uni, we stop being active. We become lazy and then it is hard to kick start our road back to exercising again.

When people start coming here for treatment for fertility issues, there is no excuse for them not to change their diet. On the very first appointment, I always tell everyone how their diet should be and to make any necessary changes. Most people change their eating habits and reap the benefits of a healthy life. Some don't listen and continue on with their bad habits. I remember one lady not changing her diet and everytime she came in, I'd ask her if she had. I kept telling her that this could be the very reason and that those few extra kilos she had on weren't helping. She also had polycystic ovaries.

After some time, she finally decided to give the diet a go and to cut back on the carbohydrates. To cut this story short, a couple of months after changing her diet, losing some weight and generally feeling much better...she fell pregnant. Oh, if only she had listened to me earlier. Then again, what would I know! :-)

Back to the serious stuff...the essential building blocks of conception come from **proteins**. Most people do not even get anywhere near enough protein in their diets. I can honestly say that not one person has ever come into my clinic with a good diet...especially the people trying to fall pregnant. I always have a little laugh when I ask people how their diet is and they say, 'I eat healthy' or 'I have a good diet'. Most people's diets are absolutely, and there is no other way to put it...CRAP!

Once again, it gets back to perception and ingrained habits taught to us by our parents. If everyone had a good diet like they said they did, then 50% of our population would not be overweight. Our heart disease rate would not be one of the worst in the world and nor would our rate of diabetes.

So, if you are considering falling pregnant or currently experiencing fertility issues, it is imperative that you all change your diets. For those who do know they have conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome, the problem is directly related to poor dietary habits, a sedentary lifestyle and stress.

Similarly, if you are **underweight**, you need to put on some weight to increase your chances. Being underweight can be just as unhealthy as being overweight. Please, for your health's sake and that of your babies, change your dietary and lifestyle habits now, before it is too late. Don't make the mistake of saying, "I'll do it later" or "I'll do it when I get old", because you never will.

Remember we are always here to help with all your health needs. I can tailor an individual diet plan and health regime that works and is easy to do.

### THE DANGERS OF BEING UNDERWEIGHT

Body fat has a regulatory role in reproduction, especially in females. To begin and maintain a normal reproductive cycle, a female must have a minimum amount of body fat. A moderate loss of fat, from 10-15% below normal weight for height may delay the onset of menstruation (menarche), inhibit ovulation during the reproductive cycle or induce the cessation of menstruation (amenorrhoea).

Both dieting and intensive exercise may reduce body fat below the minimum amount and lead to infertility. The resulting infertility is reversible following weight gain or reduction of intensive exercise or both.

It appears that in underweight or very lean females, the secretion of gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) by the hypothalamus is abnormal in quantity and timing. The result is abnormally low levels of follicle stimulation hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH). Since these hormones are deficient, ovarian follicles fail to develop normally and there is little secretion of progesterone and estrogens. The same hormonal deficiencies that cause infertility in underweight or athletic females also provide a degree of protection against cancers that are sensitive estrogens such as breast, although the reason is not known.

Studies of very obese females also indicate that they like very lean ones, experience problems with amenorrhoea and infertility. Males also experience problems related to reproduction in response to under-nutrition and weight loss. For example, they produce less prostatic fluid and reduced numbers of sperm with decreased motility.

*(Tortora and Grabowski, Principles of Anatomy and Physiology, 1996 p. 962)*