

# The Truth Behind 7 Men's Infertility Myths

By Dr. Eric Laborde  
*Audubon Fertility and Reproductive Medicine*

Conceiving a baby is a two-person endeavor. Although a woman will end up carrying and delivering the child, a man also plays a leading role in pregnancy.

If a couple has been trying to get pregnant and nothing is happening, the first thoughts often run to the woman. She must be infertile. But as nature would have it, problems with infertility are equally shared among men and women. About one-third of infertility can be attributed to male factors, and one-third can be attributed to female factors. Other cases are due to a combination of problems in *both* partners or to unknown causes.

Did you know that more than 90 percent of male infertility cases are due to low sperm counts, poor sperm quality or both? The remaining cases of male infertility are caused by a range of conditions including anatomical problems and genetic defects.

So if you're a guy who wants to increase his chances of being a dad someday, what can you do? Should you stay far, far away from laptops and bicycles and hot tubs? Should you run to the store to purchase some cotton boxers?

Perhaps the No. 1 thing you can do to increase your odds of becoming a father is to learn the difference between what is factual and what is fiction when it comes to male infertility. Here are some tips for aspiring dads:

## **Men don't have a biological clock!**

*False.* Just like women, men also have a ticking biological clock. They simply experience fertility declines later in life than women do.

After the age of 30, there is a drop in testosterone of about 1 percent a year. Testosterone is the hormone men need to make good-quality sperm. Once a man reaches 50, there is a sharp decline in testosterone levels, which can impact the quantity and the movement of sperm.

Although it may be true that men in their 60s and 70s can father children, it typically takes much longer for conception to happen. And the risk for birth defects also increases with age.

If you're a man over the age of 35, a semen analysis can provide important information regarding your fertility. The test will help your doctor determine if a low sperm count, no sperm count or sperm dysfunction is the reason for your infertility. With this information, we can create an appropriate treatment plan.

## **Size matters.**

*Maybe.* It's a fact that men of all body sizes are equal when it comes to fatherhood. However, small testicles may suggest possible infertility.

For some men, smaller-sized testicles have been linked to problems in sperm formation. A variety of physical problems may be the cause including undescended testicles as well as certain genetic conditions. These problems – which can interfere with the sperm production process or disrupt the pathway that sperm travel – are often characterized by a low sperm count and/or abnormal sperm morphology (shape and structure).

Today, advanced reproductive techniques offer men with a compromised sperm count the ability to become fathers. For example, ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) allows fertilization to occur with just one healthy sperm.

### **Put down that cell phone!**

*Not so fast.* Although there have been reports in the news that cell phone emissions can cause sperm damage, there is not enough evidence yet to indicate it is really a significant problem for men. In fact, there are several studies that state no conclusions can be drawn regarding cell phone radiation effects on the human body.

Research into the relationship between sperm quality and cell phone use is still very preliminary—and we should be cautious about how we interpret the findings. There are still many unanswered questions.

My best advice is to be aware of these studies, but don't worry too much! There are several other actions you can take to increase your overall health and improve the chances of getting your partner pregnant including quitting smoking, cutting back on alcohol, and effectively managing any chronic medical conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

### **Avoid hot tubs.**

*True.* Several studies suggest that overheated testicles can temporarily lower sperm counts. Frequent visits to the steam room or long stays in the hot tub increase scrotal temperature, which may also impact sperm quality.

But this heat exposure does not have a permanent impact of sperm. Fortunately, this type of infertility can be reversed rather quickly – within weeks or months – by simply stopping exposure to wet heat.

Men should also be careful about spending too much time on the bike or lounging too long in the bathtub. But don't be overly concerned as sperm quality typically declines only in extreme heat or regular exposure.

### **Boxers or briefs?**

*Either is fine.* We know that high heat can indeed affect sperm production and quality. However, the heat generated by wearing briefs isn't significant enough to have a huge impact on male infertility.

There's just not a lot of science behind the notion that switching from briefs to boxers improves a couple's chance of getting pregnant. So if you like to wear compression shorts when you work out, you can continue to do so knowing they won't affect sperm quality.

### **Too often is too much.**

*Not necessarily so.* A healthy male is able to replenish his full supply of sperm within 24 hours. So having frequent sex should not impact fertility.

Yes, if you have sex every day for a week, your sperm count will be slightly down. However, intercourse every day or every other day in the time leading up to your partner's expected ovulation date won't result in a consistently lower sperm count—and it could increase your chance of conception.

### **Bigger is better!**

*When it comes to BMI, that's not true.* Extra weight can lead to a multitude of health problems including diabetes and heart disease. It can also impact male infertility.

Several studies indicate that maintaining a healthy weight is beneficial to both male and female fertility. Some research also suggests that men with a higher body mass index (BMI) are more likely to be infertile than average-weight men. Too much body fat has been linked with changes in testosterone and other reproductive hormone levels in men.

Although the role of diet in male fertility is still unclear, it makes sense for everyone to eat a variety of healthy foods and get regular physical activity. Not only will you look better, you will feel better about yourself. And your partner will no doubt appreciate your physique as well.

*If you and your partner have been trying get pregnant with no luck, it may be time to seek the help of an infertility specialist. Identifying the real causes of infertility and addressing them can increase your chances of conception.*

###