

Infertility

Infertility is a condition that affects many people. A person or couple is considered to have infertility if they have had regular, unprotected sexual intercourse and a pregnancy did not happen:

- › After 1 year in people under 35 years old
- › After 6 months in people 35 years old or older

If you have any questions,
talk with your physician.

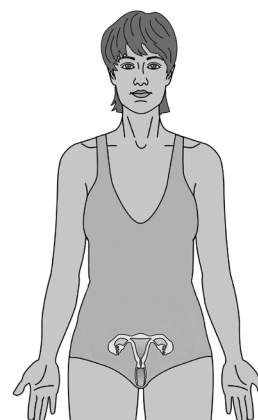
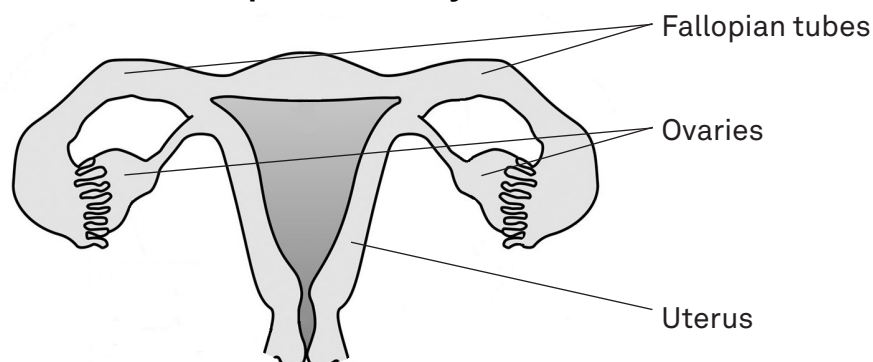
Physicians may do an evaluation for infertility in these cases.


Causes of infertility

There are many different causes of infertility. Your physician will work with you to try to find the cause. Some of the most common causes include:

Ovulation disorders – Ovulation is when the female body prepares and then releases an egg from the ovary (Figure 1). This needs to happen for a pregnancy. The most common reasons for this not to happen include polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), ovarian insufficiency and ovulation hormone problems. Your physician can discuss these conditions more.

Figure 1. Female reproductive system





Fallopian tube disorders – The fallopian tubes carry the egg from the ovary to the uterus in the female body. Blockages in the fallopian tubes can prevent a normal pregnancy. There are different causes of damage or problems in the fallopian tubes. They can include:

- › Past infections such as chlamydia or gonorrhea
- › Inflammation

Conditions with the uterus – Conditions that affect the uterus can sometimes affect fertility. These can include fibroids or the shape of the uterus. Factors that affect the endometrium (tissue that lines the uterus), such as scar tissue or an infection, can also affect fertility.

Endometriosis – In this condition, the endometrium grows outside the uterus. This can cause issues with the fallopian tubes, ovaries, uterus, and in the abdomen and pelvis. Endometriosis can be related to infertility.

Male factor – Low sperm count, sperm function or issues with sperm delivery may cause male factor infertility. There are many reasons this may happen.

Genetic causes – Sometimes, problems with the genes found in the sperm or egg can cause infertility.

Unexplained – Sometimes your care team will not find the cause of infertility.

Evaluation of infertility

Your care team will use these tools to evaluate infertility:

- › A complete history interview and physical exam
- › Blood tests to check hormone levels and find genetic problems
- › Ovulation tests to see if ovulation is happening
- › Imaging tests, such as a pelvic ultrasound, a hysterosalpingogram (X-ray procedure) or a saline-infused sonohysterogram (SIS) to look at the shape of the uterus and see if the fallopian tubes are open
- › Semen analysis to check the quantity and quality of sperm



Treatment

Your physician will work with you to create a treatment plan for you. This will be based on your test results, past treatments and goals. They may refer you to a reproductive endocrinologist, a physician who specializes in infertility. Treatment options may include:

- › Lifestyle and behavior changes
- › Surgical procedures
- › Medication to stimulate the ovaries
- › Intrauterine insemination (IUI)
- › In vitro fertilization (IVF)
- › Surrogacy
- › Adoption

Your physician can explain the details of these treatments if you are interested in them.

LGBTQ individuals and families

There are many choices for same-sex couples, nonbinary people, transgender people and other patients or couples. Talk with your physician about your goals and options.

Support

Infertility can be hard both physically and emotionally. We can offer resources, as needed. Please talk with your physician to discuss how we can best support you.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at [nm.org](https://www.nm.org).