

Fertility in Women



One in ten people in the general population are infertile. Most female survivors of cancer in childhood will be able to have children but unfortunately you have had treatment, which puts you at risk of being infertile. The treatments concerned include one or more of the following:

- Radiotherapy to the lower abdomen or pelvis (sometimes including treatment to the lower back) which may be involved the ovaries
- Total body irradiation with a bone marrow transplant
- Chemotherapy with certain drugs
- Surgery to the ovaries or uterus
- Radiotherapy or surgery to the brain (excluding leukaemia).

It is not always possible to know for certain if the treatment you had has affected your chance of having a baby. If you have been through puberty and are having regular periods, without the use of hormone replacement or the contraceptive pill, it is likely that you will be able to get pregnant. There is no way to find out definitely if you can have a baby, but your doctor in the follow up clinic can tell you of the chance of your being fertile. A special timed blood test and scan of your abdomen may help. It is very unwise to have unprotected sex unless you want a baby.

Some girls may not go into puberty and will need to take hormones to help this. It may then be necessary to continue to take the hormones even after teenage development is complete, often as the "pill" or HRT (hormone replacement therapy) as these hormones are important for your future health and general well being. They help give strength to your bones, hair and skin and maintain your periods. Newer more natural methods are now available that allow continuous hormone delivery with fewer side effects.

If you are unable, or unlikely to be able, to have a baby you will need to talk to your partner about this before you decide to have a family. There are various ways in which fertility problems can be helped. Specialist advice can be had from a fertility clinic to which you and your partner can be referred when you are ready.

All women are born with millions of eggs in the ovaries that are destroyed and used over the years. Normally the menopause happens around fifty, this is when the ovaries stop producing eggs and a woman can no longer have children. Some women who had treatment that damaged the ovaries may be able to get pregnant but may have a much earlier menopause than normal. If this is a risk for you it is wise not to delay a decision to start your family for too long. You can seek advice from your clinic and may be referred to a specialist reproductive clinic.

Remember! Fertility and sexual function are two different things. Most infertile women are capable of having a normal sex life but may need to take hormone replacement. If you have gone through puberty normally and have periods the chances are you will be fertile.

visit www.aftercure.org for tips, advice
and other useful websites