



Employee Advice Guide:

Fertility Awareness

The future of fertility support

Historically, employers wouldn't have got involved in what they considered 'private home life outside of work', but times are changing. Over the next few years, reproductive and family health is expected to play a much larger role in organisations' policies and benefit programmes.

From relationship counselling and child therapy to reproductive health support or funding, employers are now recognising that you just can't separate some life-work issues. Happiness and health at home and work are so closely intertwined.

As 1 in 4 organisations are looking to enhance support or benefits for fertility treatment, employers may start to introduce policies that help to reduce the emotional and financial burden whichever route to becoming a parent an employee takes.

fertilitynetworkuk
**FERTILITY
WEEK**
1-5 November



A white circular graphic containing the text '40% of fertility issues are male-related'. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font. The circle is surrounded by several white sperm cell illustrations with long tails, floating around it.

40%
of fertility issues
are male-related

An emotional conversation

For many years we have been reluctant to speak up about difficulties in conceiving or indeed the heartbreak of miscarriage or the emotional rollercoaster of surrogacy or adoption with our colleagues and peers.

As research shows that 19% of people facing infertility cut their hours or leave employment completely, it is encouraging to learn that employees who were once offered gym memberships and dental plans as their company perks may see a move towards 'Family Forming' benefits.

Opening the conversation about fertility has certainly accelerated a trend towards bespoke human resources benefits amongst forward-thinking employers.

Focus on female fertility factors

Age affects fertility in both men and women. But as women reach their mid to late 30s, their egg reserves start to decrease making it more difficult to conceive. As women get older into their forties the quality of the eggs also declines which can sadly lead to higher incidents of miscarriage.

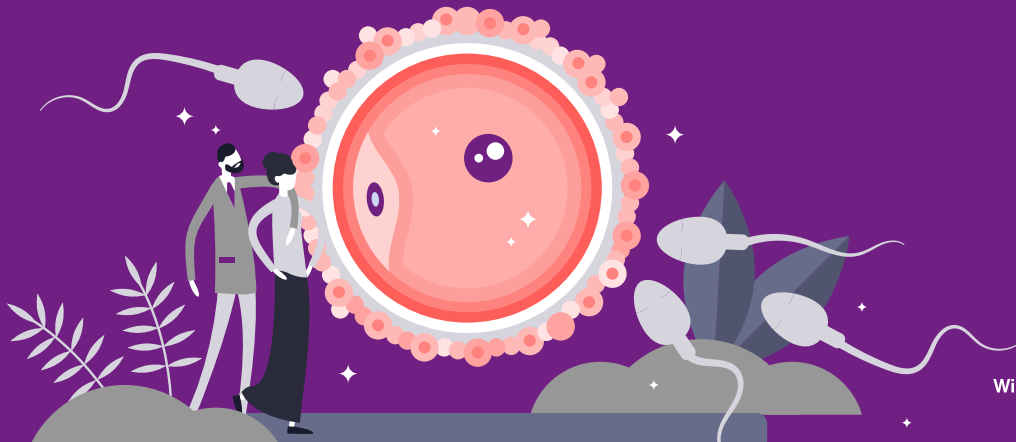
But there are other factors which may affect a woman's ability to conceive and carry a child full term.

Some are related to ovulation issues such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), thyroid problems and premature ovarian failure.

Other factors which may lead to conception difficulties include scarring post cervical surgery, fibroids, endometriosis and pelvic inflammatory disease.

Side effects to certain drugs such as chemotherapy, neuroleptic medicines and the long-term use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen and aspirin can also make it more difficult to conceive.

However, be assured that many women who have suffered from any of these illnesses or taken such treatments can go on to have healthy pregnancies.



9 steps to fertility self-help

You are more likely to get pregnant naturally or by fertility treatment if both you and your partner follow a healthy lifestyle. Before trying to conceive, you should try to make these small changes:



Fertility issues affect
1 in 6
couples in
the UK



1. Stop smoking



2. Limit alcohol intake



3. Cut down on caffeine



4. Follow a healthy diet



5. Take the recommended dose of folic acid for at least 12 weeks before trying to conceive



6. Avoid stress that can affect ovulation and sperm production



7. Having regular exercise is also thought to help improve your chances of conceiving



8. You could try complementary therapies such as acupuncture, fertility yoga and reflexology



9. Men are advised to avoid hot baths, wear loose underwear, avoid cycling and not to carry their mobile phone in the front pocket of their trousers

The paths to parenthood

Here we look at some alternative family and fertility options and an overview of employment rights in the workplace.

In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)

According to NICE fertility guidelines, women aged under 40 are eligible for 3 rounds of IVF on the NHS (or 1 round for women aged 40-42) if they've been trying to get pregnant for two years or have not been able to get pregnant after 12 rounds of artificial insemination. However, individual NHS clinical commissioning groups make the final decision about who can have NHS funded assisted

reproductive treatment in their area.

You should note that legally, you have no statutory right to time off work for fertility treatment. However, your employer should treat your IVF appointments like any other medical appointment and if you are off sick due to the side effects, this should be treated like any other sick leave.

70,000
IVF treatment
cycles are carried
out each year in
the UK



Surrogacy

Data from the English family court shows a 350% growth in UK and international surrogacy over the past 12 years. Although the process can be complex, the intended parents in a surrogacy arrangement (those who intend to apply for a Parental Order within 6 months of the birth) are entitled to unpaid time off to accompany the surrogate mother to up to two antenatal appointments.


The law currently only gives maternity leave and pay to the surrogate who will be giving birth to the baby. However, intended parents are entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) and up to 52 weeks' leave if they meet the qualifying conditions.

If you are having a baby through a surrogacy arrangement you can only take adoption leave from the birth rather than two weeks before the child's adoption which is the case for parents who are adopting.



350%
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In the
UK around
6,000
children need
to be adopted
every year

Adoption

You are entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) and to take up to 52 weeks' adoption leave and parents can decide which parent will be the adopter for adoption leave purposes. Meanwhile, the other parent may qualify for two weeks' paternity leave and pay.

Egg and sperm freezing

The number of British women freezing their eggs has more than tripled in the past five years, making it more mainstream and one of the fastest growing fertility treatments.

However, there is currently no statutory entitlement to time off to undergo such treatment. The same goes for sperm freezing.



Enquiries about egg freezing increased **50%** since COVID-19

37% believe egg freezing should be a corporate benefit



More than
one in five
pregnancies
end in
miscarriage

The illustration features a pregnant woman in a white dress, holding her belly. She has a distressed expression, with her hand to her forehead. Above her head are several thought bubbles: one contains a tangled web of lines, another contains a dark, swirling mass, and others contain small icons of sperm cells. The background is a dark purple with stylized green plants and white sparkles. Two sperm cells are shown in the upper left corner.

Counting the cost

The average cost of surrogacy is around £30,000 and one round of IVF typically costs £6,000, so it's understandable that the 3.5 million people in the UK experiencing fertility issues would welcome access to credible support services and benefits through their employer.

Only egg freezing for patients undergoing medical treatment affecting fertility is NHS-funded. If you are considering having your eggs frozen, you can expect to pay around £3,350 plus medication up to £1500 and storage costs around £350 per year.

Additional workplace support

If you are exploring alternative routes to becoming a parent, it may be worth checking with your employer and your individual contract to see if there are any enhanced terms or support they may be able to offer.

Fertility support groups

If you feel like you need additional support while trying to conceive or going through treatment, you may want to find a local support group or call a free support line run by two former fertility nurses to help you on your journey.

You can find all the information you need here: [fertilitynetworkuk.org](https://www.fertilitynetworkuk.org)

Or if you would like help and support following a miscarriage, visit: [miscarriageassociation.org.uk](https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk)

Further information

ACAS offer further helpful workplace guidance on [IVF treatment](#) and [surrogacy leave](#), whilst the government offers guidance on [adoption leave and pay](#).



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