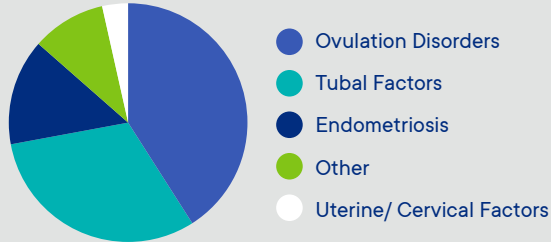




Let's break down the main reasons why some women might have trouble getting pregnant:



When trying for a baby, most couples who have sexual intercourse every 2-3 days will succeed within a year to fall pregnant (see information leaflet on how to get pregnant). If they don't, they might have fertility issues. Unfortunately, infertility is quite common, with 1 in 6 couples facing this problem.

For about a quarter of infertility, it's because of male health issues, another quarter is because of female health issues, another quarter is due to both, and sometimes doctors can't find the reason.

## Ovulation disorders

Ovulation is when an egg is released from the ovary, and it needs to happen for pregnancy to be possible (see information leaflet on how to get pregnant). About 40% of the time, women have trouble getting pregnant because they don't ovulate regularly. The most common reason for this is a condition called polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) (see information leaflet on PCOS). Sometimes being overweight or underweight can also cause ovulation issues. Less commonly, the pituitary and adrenal glands, which are part of the hormonal system, may have some problems.

Sometimes, couples might be having sex at the wrong time; there's a specific time each month when pregnancy is most likely to happen which is called the fertile window (see the information leaflet on how to get pregnant).

## Age-related fertility decline

As women get older, they may not ovulate every month (see information leaflet on female fertility with age). When ovulation doesn't happen, the woman cannot get pregnant.

Female fertility starts to decline for most women by their mid 30s, and by age 40, only a small number of women will be able to achieve a pregnancy without help. Age is also a limiting factor in assisted reproduction (see leaflet on IVF).

Women stop ovulating when they reach menopause, which usually happens between ages 45 and 55, as their menstrual cycles stop. If menopause happens before age 40, it's called premature ovarian insufficiency.

## Premature ovarian insufficiency (POI)

Premature ovarian insufficiency is when a woman's ovaries stop working before she turns 40. The symptoms can be irregular menstrual cycles, vaginal dryness and infertility. It can make it really hard to get pregnant because she won't ovulate very often. If she wants to have a baby, she might need to see a fertility doctor. IVF is significantly less likely to be successful, and egg donation may be the best option.

## Ovarian cysts

These are sacs filled with fluid on the ovaries. Most of the time, they're harmless and go away on their own, but some can be more serious and need treatment.

## Endometriosis

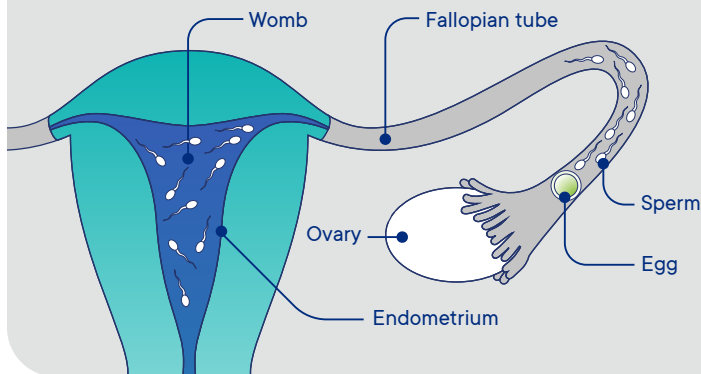
Endometriosis affects one in ten women and about 14% of infertile women have endometriosis (see the information leaflet on endometriosis).



## Fallopian tubes

For fertilisation to happen, the sperm and the egg have to meet in the Fallopian tube. But for 30% of women with fertility issues, their Fallopian tubes are blocked so the sperm and egg cannot meet.

The most common reason the tubes become blocked is through pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which is an infection of the womb, Fallopian tubes, ovaries and pelvis. PID can be caused by many factors, and sexually transmitted infections, including gonorrhoea and chlamydia, cause one in four cases. PID can also occur after contraceptive coil insertion and some gynaecological surgery (for example, surgical management of miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, or hysteroscopy; a camera test to check the womb lining).



## Other Causes of Female Infertility

### → Psychosexual causes of infertility

Sometimes, a couple's difficulty in getting pregnant can be because of emotional or psychological issues. For example, if it's painful for a woman to have sex, which can happen due to various reasons such as infections, changes during menopause, conditions like endometriosis or fibroids, or a condition called vaginismus where the muscles in the vagina tighten up unexpectedly. Vaginismus can be treated with special therapy, relaxation techniques, exercises, and the use of vaginal trainers, which are small, tampon-like devices that gradually increase in size.

### → Genetic factors

Additionally, there are genetic reasons that could make it hard for a couple to have a baby. For women, this could mean having a condition such as Turner Syndrome, where they only have one X chromosome instead of the usual two, or other rare chromosomal issues. Genetic causes of infertility may be "silent" and can only be identified by specialized tests.

## Womb problems

There are several abnormalities which can affect the womb such as: congenital malformations; fibroids; endometriosis; and infection.

## Fibroids

Fibroids are growths in the womb that aren't cancerous. They're common and can cause symptoms such as heavy periods and pain. They might also make it harder to get pregnant. These growths can be as small as a pea or as large as a melon, and a woman might have just one or several of them. While we don't know exactly what causes fibroids, they seem to be connected to female hormones and often occur in families. They are more common in Black women.

Many women don't realize they have fibroids until they have trouble getting pregnant or during a regular check-up or ultrasound. Sometimes, fibroids can be felt during a pelvic exam because they stick out.

Whether or not a woman needs treatment for fibroids depends on if they're causing symptoms, how big they are, where they are, and if she's trying to get pregnant. If fibroids aren't causing problems, they might not need to be treated.

