

FERTILITY AND SEXUAL HEALTH





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FERTILITY AND SEXUAL HEALTH

UNDERSTANDING HOW CYSTIC FIBROSIS AFFECTS YOUR FERTILITY AND KNOWING HOW TO STAY SAFE WHEN YOU'RE SEXUALLY ACTIVE IS IMPORTANT FOR EVERYONE.

FEMALE FERTILITY

Most women with cystic fibrosis are fertile and can become pregnant without help from fertility services. But for a small number of women, CF impacts on your ability to conceive naturally.

CF causes thicker cervical mucus, which can cause issues with sperm fertilising an egg. Irregular periods and a low weight can also affect your ability to become pregnant. Your overall health and lung function can also add some challenges to deciding if having a baby is right for you.

Generally, your lung function needs to be stable to support a healthy pregnancy, and good nutrition and weight can improve your chances of conceiving naturally.

You may need to improve your lung function or overall health to make sure you and your baby stay well during pregnancy. Talk with your CF team early if you think a family is in your future as it can take time to improve your health and lung function.



MALE FERTILITY

Most men with CF will need help from fertility specialists to conceive a child. This is because

the tube that carries sperm from your testicles to your penis, called the vas deferens, is either blocked or missing. You still produce sperm, but it can't get to where it needs to go.

A blocked or missing vas deferens doesn't affect your ability to get an erection, have sex or ejaculate.

Although the chances are high you'll need help conceiving, don't assume you're infertile. Play it safe if you're sexually active and talk with your CF team about checking your fertility. This can be done through a simple semen analysis which uses a sample of your semen and checks for the number, size, shape and movement of any sperm in your sample.

NEW ZEALAND FERTILITY SERVICES

Private and publicly funded fertility treatment is available in New Zealand.

To be eligible for publicly funded fertility treatment you're scored against a Clinical Priority Assessment Criteria (CPAC) system. This system takes into account factors such as your medical history, how long you've been trying to conceive and your age. You need to score 65 points or more to qualify for publicly funded treatment.

Publicly funded treatment covers most types of fertility treatment such as intra uterine insemination, intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection and in vitro fertilisation, however eligibility varies between district health boards.



FERTILITY TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR WOMEN

Ovulation induction

Ovulation induction (OI) uses two medications – clomiphene or letrozole – to help restore your menstrual cycle if you're not ovulating or have irregular cycles.

OI doesn't use injections and you still have sex to become pregnant.

Intra uterine insemination

Intra uterine insemination (IUI) helps to give your partner's sperm a bit of a head start. The best sperm are chosen in a lab and inserted directly into your uterus. Simple IUI can be helpful when your cervical mucus is thick. Stimulated IUI uses medications such as clomiphene to increase the number of mature eggs you have at ovulation.

IUI involves some blood tests, ultrasounds and injections.

OI and IUI are known as non-IVF treatments.

In vitro fertilisation

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment is often used to give eggs and sperm the best chance of getting together to create a pregnancy. Eggs and sperm are collected from both partners and are fertilised in a lab to create an embryo. When IVF includes having the sperm injected directly into the egg, it's called intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI).

The best embryo is chosen and is transferred to your uterus.

Sometimes other good quality embryos can be frozen for another chance of pregnancy.

FERTILITY TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR MEN

Most men with CF will need help from a fertility specialist to father a child.

Surgical sperm retrieval is an option for men wanting to conceive.

Percutaneous epididymal sperm aspiration (PESA), microsurgical

epididymal sperm aspiration (MESA), testicular sperm extraction (TESE) and testicular sperm aspiration (TESA) are various procedures where your healthy sperm cells are extracted and used to fertilise an egg, such as through intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection or in vitro fertilisation.

A fertility specialist, either privately or publicly funded will discuss what sperm retrieval is right for you. Sperm retrieval is done using either a local or general anaesthetic.

Surgical sperm retrieval can be something to think about during organ transplant work up. Post organ transplant involves a lot of medications which can reduce the quantity and quality of your sperm .

OTHER OPTIONS FOR STARTING A FAMILY

Donor options, surrogacy and adoption are other options to start a family, which your fertility specialist can discuss with you.

SEXUAL HEALTH

You have the same risk as everyone else for getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), so practice safe sex.

Talk about your sexual health with your CF team. Yes, it's usually awkward, but understanding how CF affects your sex life and how to stay safe is important. All sexually active adults need to know how to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections and when you have CF it's helpful to talk about any challenges you have to make sure you have a happy and health sex life.

If you're sexually active it's important you use a contraceptive to avoid an unplanned pregnancy. There are a few options to consider, such as intrauterine contraception, hormonal contraception and barrier methods.



It's also important to discuss contraception methods, as antibiotics, malabsorption and hormonal changes from birth control pills can impact on effectiveness and your overall health. There's some evidence certain hormonal contraception can increase your risk of osteoporosis.

HOW CF CAN AFFECT YOUR SEX LIFE

For the most part, cystic fibrosis doesn't affect your sexual desire or performance. Common challenges people with CF have during sex are often due to physical exertion, such as coughing and shortness of breath.

For females, physical changes can affect your sex life and include:

- thick and dry vaginal mucus – this can cause pain during intercourse but lubrication may help.
- urinary incontinence
- physical exertion
- yeast infections – a common issue for women with CF because of increased antibiotic use
- pain.

Some people with CF also worry about how their body looks because of scars, gastrostomy tubes and stretch marks.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust (UK) has produced a booklet *Body Image and Cystic Fibrosis*, which is a great resource to download for further information. [\[link\]](#)

For males, CF doesn't affect your ability to get an erection, have sex or ejaculate.

TALKING WITH YOUR PARTNER ABOUT CF

Healthy relationships are built on trust. Talk with your partner or potential partner about how CF affects you, both physically and emotionally.

When and how you choose to do this is up to you, but many adults with CF will tell you from experience it's better to be upfront with your partner early on in the relationship about your CF. Love and relationships come with no guarantee for anyone, but being open and honest with your partner is a good foundation to build upon.

SPILL

Spill is an Australian website that focuses on sexual health, sex and fertility specifically for people with CF.

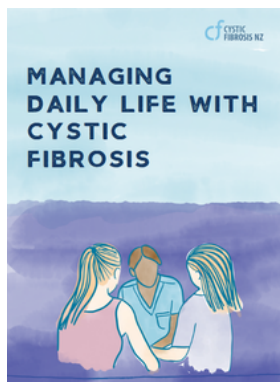
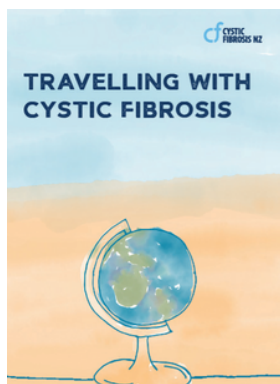
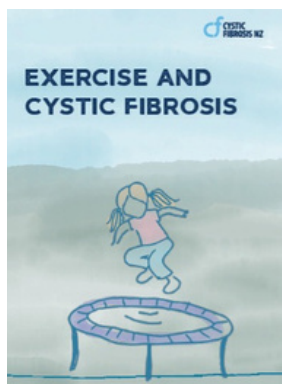
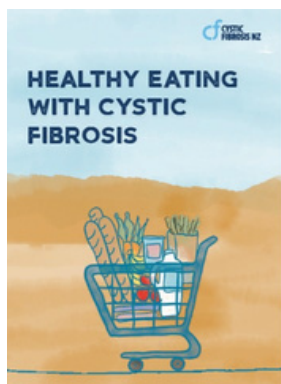
Visit spill.org.au

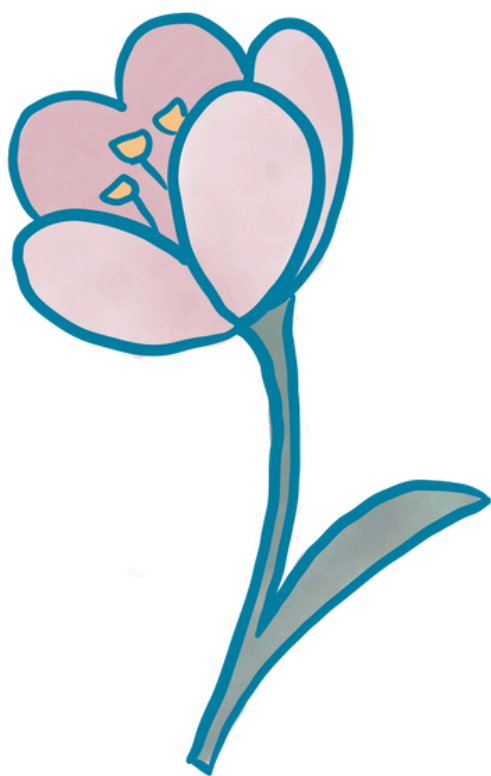
"Irregular periods and period pain were big issues for me. I felt like it was unnecessary pain and stress while trying to juggle the more primary CF related issues. I was prescribed the pill to help, which made things a bit more regular, and it also meant I could skip periods all together. I later opted for an IUD, which helped with the pain too. It's important to know that you have options if you're struggling like I was, but you might just be the one who has to bring it up with your CF team."



DOCUMENTS IN THE ADULT GUIDE SET:

Click on icon to below to view other resources.





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