

FERTILITY & MENTAL HEALTH



What is infertility?

Infertility is defined by the World Health Organisation as a disease of the reproductive system.

In the UK, approximately 1 in 6 heterosexual couples will struggle to conceive – that's around 3.5 million people per year. However this number doesn't include same-sex couples, or single or trans people.

Although often seen as a women's health issue, the reality is that both men and women are just as likely to face fertility problems. Data from the fertility regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, shows that male infertility is the most common reason for a couple to start treatment.

Fertility issues are complex. Individuals can be affected in a number of ways:

- Physically as a result of the impact of treatment.
- Mentally because of the emotional distress of infertility and its treatment.
- Financially, because most people in the UK have to self fund treatment.
- Socially because infertility can be isolating, with a deep impact of relationships.

A person's fertility journey and the issues they encounter on it may vary considerably from diagnosis, through the treatment and beyond, if treatment is not successful and other pathways to parenthood are explored.

Fertility issues are much more common than we may assume and can affect a higher proportion of the workforce than previously acknowledged. It is in the best interest of staff and the whole workplace that support is offered.

Good to know

- Fertility issues affect both men and women from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Success rates for treatment vary but it can take many years to get referred or for treatment to work.
- The average IVF cycle takes 4-6 weeks (but can be longer) and involves numerous clinic visits.
- Treatment will not be successful for everyone, and despite years of trying there may not be a pregnancy.
- After an embryo transfer there is the '2 week wait' until a pregnancy test is done, this can be a time full of a lot of emotion and anxiety for the persons undergoing treatment.
- For many people, fertility issues are one of the biggest life events they will ever face.

Engagement

Many LMs feel overwhelmed by discussing fertility issues at work. It is really important to know that you don't have to be a medical expert or have all the answers.

The fact you have already picked up this guide shows you are already doing the right things. The Defence Fertility Network is here for support and guidance as you help your teams.

Each person's situation is totally unique and their needs at work will be also. Keep in mind that fertility issues often involve a long and complex journey and that these initial conversations may well need to be revisited over time as people's experiences and needs vary.

Top tips

- Do a little research and use support from organisations such as the Defence Fertility Network or the Fertility Network UK.
- Come up with a plan together to ensure work and treatment is prioritised.
- Be available throughout the process to check in on how things are progressing. Some may want less involvement than others but it is important that there is at least an option for regular check ins.
- The process of treatment both mentally and physically is exhausting, so flexibility at work and ongoing support are vital.

Questions to ask

What are the practical implications of the next few weeks and what reasonable adjustments might help?

Do you have any upcoming deployments or courses?

What are the emotional support needs that will help you with this?

Does your partner have support systems in place?

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Ministry
of Defence



Defence Fertility
Network

How to help long term

Increasingly staff are feeling able to initiate conversations around fertility at work, but the long-term commitment and support needed is not always available. It is vital to think of this in terms of ongoing support rather than just an initial conversation.

It is not uncommon for people's journeys to last for many years and to take many different routes. Support needs to be ongoing and flexible to meet the current needs of the staff member. This needs to be matched by a commitment to making your place of work as fertility friendly as possible.

Reasonable adjustments. What practical help might be needed at work from a fridge to store medication to a quiet place to self-inject.

Workplace Culture. Whether in the office or remotely, work often has its own patterns and norms that may or may not be helpful to someone facing fertility issues. For example, if talk of family life, sharing pregnancy news etc, is happening frequently this can for many be difficult to cope with and result in people feeling marginalised and isolated.

Ongoing commitment. Making our work as inclusive and welcoming to all facing fertility issues will take time and a commitment to keep this on the agenda. Making sure this is a priority for support going forward will help both staff members and the workplace as a whole.

Online & Other Resources

Fertility Network UK:

www.fertilitynetworkuk.org

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority:

www.hfea.gov.uk

Scottish Care and Information on Miscarriage:

www.miscarriagesupport.org.uk

Miscarriage Association:

www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

Tommy's the baby charity:

www.tommys.org

British Infertility Counselling Association:

www.bica.net

HIMFertility:

www.himfertility.com

Toby Trice Racing (male fertility):

www.tobytriceracing.com

Fertility Resource & Community:

www.ivfbabble.com

LGBT Mummies:

www.lgbtmummies.com

TwoDads UK:

www.twodadsuk.com

The Fertility Podcast:

www.thefertilitypodcast.com

Further advice

Search 'Defence Fertility Network' on Facebook - A welcoming, rank-less confidential support group. Supporting those on or considering a fertility journey. Available to all Service personnel and their partners.

Service Leads:

Royal Air Force: Sadie Pairman

Royal Navy: Rachel Smedley and Laura Dietz

Army: John O'Neill

JSP 661 Health and Wellbeing. Chapter 2 Section 4.



FACEBOOK

Please reach out to any of the Service Leads should you have any questions. We are here to help and are on hand to provide guidance, advice or best practice for managing fertility in the work-place.