



Why is male fertility declining?

By Nutritional Therapist Sandra James for **CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine)**.

The sperm count of healthy men has more than halved in the last 40 years, and is declining by about 1% every year, according to recent reports. 'Male factor' infertility is now said to account for approximately 40–50% of infertility cases. What's happening?

A basic sperm test checks only for sperm quantity and if they're swimming in the right direction (motility). The quality of the sperm is not assessed, despite being vitally important to egg fertilisation and survival of the embryo.

When sperm are maturing, they are bathed in fluid which influences the quality of the sperm. The fluid will either be rich in nutrients or high in substances that could damage the sperm, depending on what the man eats, drinks, and his lifestyle.

Risk factors. The most common substances that damage sperm include alcohol, cigarette smoke, infections, a poor diet low in essential nutrients, and environmental toxins. Whilst our exposure to each toxin may be very small, continuous exposure to low doses of multiple toxins can be very harmful.

The risk factors for alcohol and cigarette smoke are well known, but what are the other key environmental toxins to consider when it comes to fertility, and what can we do about them?

Pesticides. Pesticide exposure leads to poor semen quality and reduced male fertility. *Do: Eat organic food wherever possible, and avoid using pesticides and other chemicals in your home and garden. Investigate natural alternatives.*

Mobile phones & laptops. A 'decrease in sperm count, motility, viability, and normal morphology is related to the duration of exposure to cell phones'. Laptops and iPads may have a similar effect. Use of these devices also affects sleep by reducing production of the hormone melatonin and increasing stress levels. *Do: Consider using anti-radiation/EMF phone & laptop cases. Do not keep devices by your body or your bed. Switch off when possible and minimise use 1-2 hours before bed.*

Plastics. Plastic, and the industrial chemicals that go to make it such as BPA (bisphenol A), are now everywhere, from our food storage containers and water bottles to our personal care products. Most of the food we buy from supermarkets is wrapped in it. There is growing evidence that many plasticizers, such as BPA and phthalates, mimic the structures of natural hormones, impacting fertility status by disrupting our endocrine system (our glands that produce and secrete hormones). *Do: Buy veg loose from an organic veg box scheme. Remove food from any plastic as soon as possible. Use glass bottles where possible.*

Heavy metals. These can enter our body through drinking, eating, inhaling, and skin and eye contact. Once in the body, they cause damage at the cellular level by initiating oxidative stress. Metals such as aluminium, cadmium and lead cause male infertility by affecting sperm quality and motility.

Aluminium is a common component of foil, cans and cookware, antacids, nasal spray and antiperspirants. Drinking water, old homes, and tobacco smoke are all potential sources of toxic lead exposure. Exposure to cadmium happens primarily through contaminated foods, but cigarettes and fertilisers are also sources. *Do: Use stainless steel, glass or enamelled cast iron cookware. Avoid aluminium foil and non-stick cookware. Buy a high-quality water*

filter for your drinking and bathing water and use natural personal care products.

Putting these steps in place alongside eating a nutrient-dense diet to support natural detoxification, is a good start to minimising the impact of the environment on your fertility. See a naturopathic nutritional therapist for personalised guidance on nutrition and lifestyle.



Sandra James

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