



Weight & Infertility

Most people appreciate that things such as smoking and age may cause problems when trying for a baby. However few people realize that their weight can be an important factor too. This is because being very underweight or overweight can drastically interfere with the body's reproductive functions for both men and women. Hormone levels can become imbalanced and egg and sperm production may be disrupted, which reduces the chances of becoming pregnant. If pregnancy is achieved, excess weight also increases the risks associated with pregnancy. Even assisted reproduction techniques such as IVF (*in vitro* fertilisation) are less likely to succeed for underweight and overweight patients.

For these reasons, some patients experiencing difficulty conceiving naturally may be required to lose or gain weight and may be set a strict target before treatment can begin. This can seem very unfair, especially as infertility itself is already distressing enough. However overwhelming evidence from research suggests that reaching the ideal weight for your height can dramatically improve your chances of becoming pregnant and safely carrying the baby to term.

Since so many of the factors involved with infertility are out of the patients' control, this is something positive you can do to try and overcome your difficulties and increase your chances of having a baby. Weight loss and weight gain can be very difficult to achieve, especially if you're struggling on your own, so patients are urged to seek help and support from the Fertility Centre (0116 2585922). In some cases patients may need additional guidance from professionals such as dieticians about exercise and dieting. Counselling can also help relieve the emotional burden imposed by infertility.

Body Mass Index (BMI)	
Less than 19	Underweight
19 - 25	Ideal weight
26 - 30	Overweight
More than 30	Obese

Body Mass Index is a measure of whether your weight is right for your height. See chart overleaf to calculate your own BMI.
One of the conditions to qualify for NHS treatment is that women must have a BMI between 19 and 30.

"Obesity is implicated in: (1) Reduced pregnancy rates, (2) Increased miscarriage rates, (3) Increased pregnancy morbidity [maternal illness during pregnancy - including both non-fatal and fatal conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS)] and (4) complications if surgical intervention is required."

- The British Fertility Society

"Underweight and overweight women were about half as likely to get pregnant as normal-weight women... Embryos were more likely to take hold in the uterus in normal-weight women than in underweight or overweight women... [For women with a BMI greater than 30], the chance of having an IVF baby fell to about 3% per cycle – compared to 25% for women of normal weight."

-A Study by Drs P B Miller and W R Boone, Greenville Hospital, South Carolina, U.S.A

"Extra fatty tissue makes ultrasound imaging more fuzzy and harder to visualize the ovaries and egg-containing follicles and safely know where the needle tip is."

- Risks for Patient During IVF Egg Retrieval, Advanced Fertility Centre of Chicago

"Women of average weight have a 60% greater chance of conception than overweight women."

-Research by the Dept. of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Australia

"Being overweight may reduce a man's chances of fathering a baby by reducing the sperm count below the level needed to fertilise an egg and impairing sperm quality, possibly due to a decrease in testosterone levels. Also the excess fatty tissue can form an 'apron' over the genital area and overheat the testicles, impairing sperm production."

- Dr W Roudebush, Reproductive Biology Associates, Atlanta, U.S.A

"Reducing weight in overweight women could restore menstrual cycle regularity. Studies from Italy, the UK and Australia demonstrated that a weight reduction of 5% is enough to restore normal menstrual cycle function in up to 60% of overweight women."

- Dr P Burton, Concept Fertility Centre, Australia

Height (feet and inches)

	5'0"	5'1"	5'2"	5'3"	5'4"	5'5"	5'6"	5'7"	5'8"	5'9"	5'10"	5'11"	6'0"	6'1"	
100	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	14	14	14	13	45
105	21	20	19	19	18	17	17	16	16	16	15	15	14	14	57
110	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	15	50
115	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	17	17	17	16	16	15	52
120	23	23	22	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	54
125	24	24	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	57
130	25	25	24	23	22	22	21	20	20	19	19	18	18	17	59
135	26	26	25	24	23	22	22	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	61
140	27	26	26	25	24	23	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	18	63
145	28	27	27	26	25	24	23	23	22	21	21	20	20	19	66
150	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	23	23	22	22	21	20	20	68
155	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	20	70
160	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	21	72
165	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	22	75
170	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	22	77
175	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	23	79
180	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	24	82
185	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	27	26	25	24	84
190	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	26	25	86
195	38	37	36	35	33	32	31	31	30	29	28	27	26	26	88
200	39	38	37	35	34	33	32	31	30	30	29	28	27	26	91
205	40	39	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	29	28	27	93
210	41	40	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	28	95
215	42	41	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	98
220	43	42	40	39	38	37	36	34	33	32	32	31	30	29	100
225	44	43	41	40	39	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	31	30	102
230	45	43	42	41	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	30	104
235	46	44	43	42	40	39	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	31	107
240	47	45	44	43	41	40	39	38	36	35	34	33	33	32	109
245	48	46	45	43	42	41	40	38	37	36	35	34	33	32	111
	150	152.5	155	157.5	160	162.5	165	167.5	170	172.5	175	177.5	180	182.5	

Height (centimetres)

Below 19: Underweight

19-24: Ideal Weight

25-30: Overweight

Above 30: Obese

Fertility Issues with Obese or Underweight Patients Obesity

- Irregular or infrequent menstrual cycles
- Impaired ovulation
- Increased risk of infertility
- Increased risk during fertility surgery (obese patients only)
- Decreased success rates of treatments

Potential Pregnancy Complications with

- Increased risk of miscarriage
- Increased risk of diabetes during pregnancy
- Increased risk of high blood pressure
- Increased risk of needing a Caesarean section