

## **The Effect of Eating Disorders on Fertility**

The consequences of eating disorders are wide and varied with many people believing that once the eating disorder has been overcome, any health problems are alleviated with no long lasting problems when in fact this is not necessarily true.

Anyone who has suffered from an eating disorder may have put many of their bodily functions and anatomical features at risk from the effects of vitamin and nutrient depletion.

The female cycle is one such area that may be put at risk from an eating disorder and is a common cause for fertility problems in the future.

### **Why Is Fertility Affected By Eating Disorders?**

The most common cause for fertility problems related to eating disorders is because of long periods of depleted nutrition and rapid weight loss which interferes with hormonal balance which has an effect on the menstrual cycle and egg release.

It is also common to suffer from a lack of sex drive and anxiety and depression often related to poor or altered body image meaning the chances of conceiving are reduced even further.

Often these issues are not discovered until the woman seeks advice from a fertility specialist who will try and determine why the woman is having problems conceiving. This usually means carrying out fertility tests to try and find out why the person cannot conceive and whether it is the cycle, the quality of the eggs or the inside of the womb that is the problem.

Often the issue of eating disorders is brought up either by the specialist or the patient if it is thought this might be the problem.

### **What Happens In The Body Of those With An Eating Disorder?**

The effects of eating disorders on fertility are quite varied. It is common to have an irregular menstrual cycle meaning that periods are infrequent and ovulation is altered. Eggs that are released however can be reduced in quality and find the womb an inhospitable environment.

Any egg that does become fertilised however, may find it difficult to embed in the womb lining, or if it does, find it difficult to grow which increase the chance of miscarriage. It has also been found that polycystic ovary syndrome is more common in those with a history of eating disorders. This is a condition that causes the ovaries to produce many follicles containing many lesser quality eggs.

### **Compulsive Overeating**

It is not just those with the most common forms of eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia who risk their fertility, as being overweight can have a detrimental effect as well.

Obesity can also affect hormonal levels and alter the menstrual cycle and the time and quality of the eggs released. Those who are overweight are also more likely to suffer from polycystic ovaries and they may be more at risk of miscarriage due to the pressure on the body.

Eating disorders are very complex illnesses with many possible causes being the trigger to the illness. The effects on the body are very serious, sometimes life threatening and one of the other serious side-effects is the chances of becoming infertile.