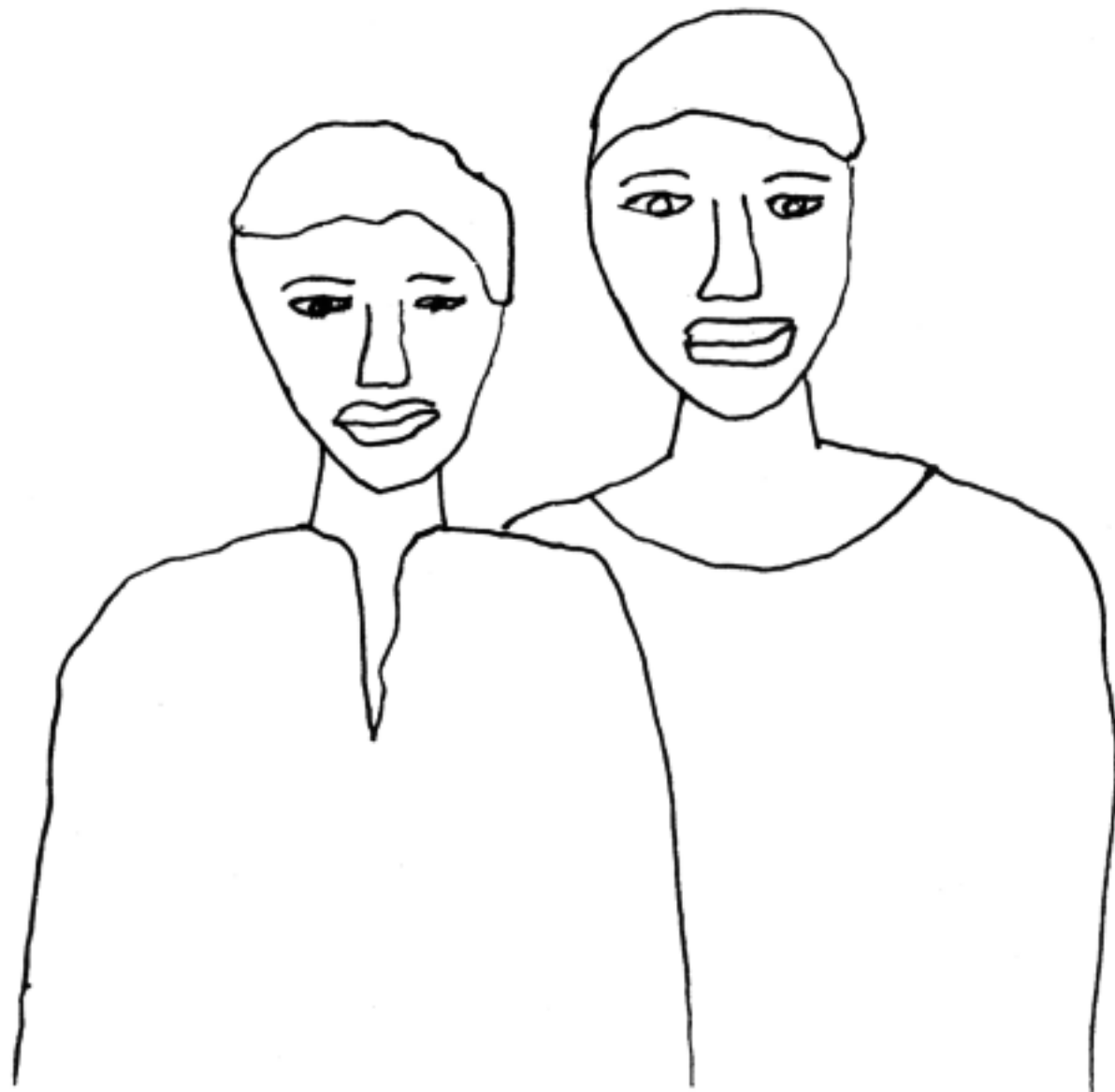


# Why Can't We Make A Baby?



## The Problem Of Infertility

This is Nomsa's story. She said: "I had a baby when I was 17 years old. My mother looked after the child. Now I am 27 years old. I have a boyfriend who is a good man. We want to have a baby together. But for three years we have tried and still we have no baby. We are getting impatient. I feel so sad each month when my period comes. I have been pregnant before. I don't understand why I am not getting pregnant again."

### **Infertility Is A Common Problem**

Many men and women have the problem of not being able to make a baby. One out of every six couples have an infertility problem sometime in their lives. When you decide to have your first child, you never expect to have problems. You never expect to be infertile. You know that it may take a few months, maybe even a year, but you do expect to fall pregnant. You are even more surprised when you already have a child and can't get pregnant again. In this article we talk about this problem of infertility. We talk in a very open way, and we have drawings that show parts of men and women's bodies that are not usually shown in public. This is the only way that we can help to explain the problem of infertility and ways to overcome it.

### **What Is Infertility?**

You or your partner is infertile if you have been having regular sex without prevention for more than a year, and have not got pregnant.

### **What Causes Infertility?**

Many men and women believe that it is always the woman's fault if she does not get pregnant. This is not true. Both men and women need to understand that infertility is a shared problem. The sadness and the burden of infertility should not be carried by women alone. The same number of cases of infertility are caused by male problems as by female problems. And the same number of cases again are caused by problems with both the man and the woman. So if a couple are infertile, the man and woman must both be examined. It is a shared problem.

There are many causes of infertility. Some of these are easy to treat. Other causes can be very difficult to treat. It is important that you know how a baby is made, so that you can understand what can stop a baby being made!

### **How Is A Baby Made?**

When a man and woman have sex, and the man has an orgasm, a small amount of fluid

comes out of his penis. This fluid is stored in his testicles. In the fluid there are millions of tiny sperm. These sperm swim from the woman's vagina, through her cervix and into her womb. A woman has two ovaries. The ovaries store eggs that go towards making a baby. Every month one egg leaves the ovary, and it travels from the ovary along her tube to the womb. When a man and woman have sex, if the sperm joins with an egg, then a baby is made.

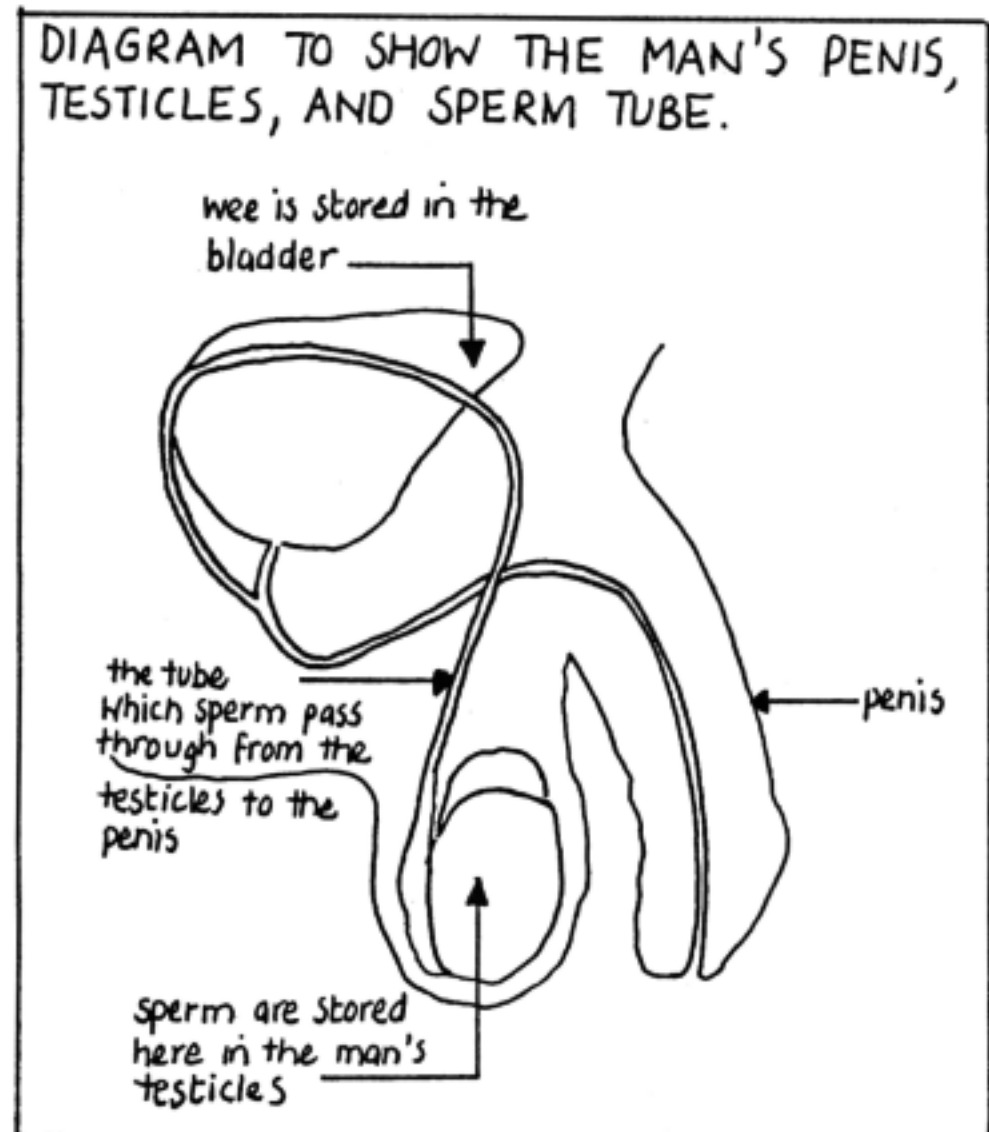
### Things That Can Cause Infertility

Sometimes the problem of infertility lies with the man. Sometimes it is with the woman. And sometimes it is a problem with both the man and the woman.

### The Man May Be Infertile

There are lots of things that can cause infertility in a man. Here is a list of them:

- \* A man may be infertile if he makes no sperm or makes only a few sperm.
- \* A man may be infertile if the sperm are weak and do not swim well and they cannot reach the egg.



- \* A man may be infertile if the tubes that the sperm comes through from the testes to the penis are blocked.

\* A man may be infertile because of problems when he has sex. It is a problem if his penis does not get hard when he has sex. Or if he gets too excited and his sperm come out before his penis is deep inside the vagina.

\* A man may be infertile if he drinks too much alcohol. Alcohol makes the man weak when he has sex, and it makes the sperm weak.

### The Woman May Be Infertile

There are lots of things that can cause a woman to be infertile. Here is a list of them:

\* A woman may be infertile if she has had a bad infection in her womb or her tubes. This is called Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (P.I.D). You are more likely to get P.I.D. if you have a loop, but have never had a baby. You get this disease from having sex with an infected man. You usually know if you have this illness as it gives you pain, fever and a discharge. But sometimes you can have this infection without feeling sick. This infection can block your tubes. This means that the egg cannot travel from the ovary to the womb.

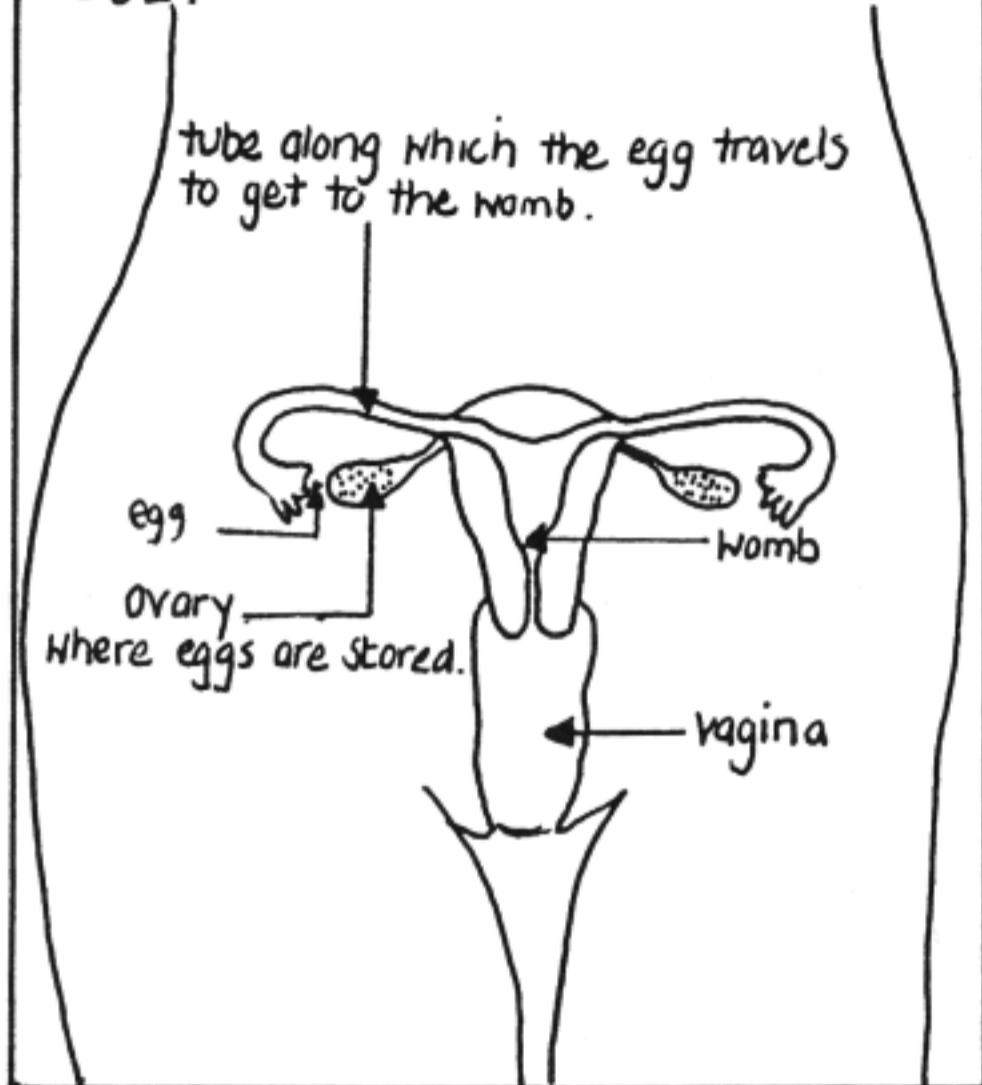
\* A few women who have used the contraceptive injection called depo find they cannot get pregnant when they want to. If this happens this problem can be helped with medicine.

\* A woman may be infertile if she does not produce an egg. This usually means that you do not get your period every month. These are some of the things that can stop you having periods:

- \* If you do not eat enough healthy food, and get too thin.
- \* If you eat too much and get very fat.
- \* If you have a serious illness, like TB.
- \* If you have too many things worrying or upsetting you.

\* A woman may be infertile if the opening to the womb, called the cervix, keeps the sperm out. The cervix produces mucus which then comes out of the vagina as a normal discharge in healthy women. Sometimes this mucus fights against the sperm, and kills the sperm before they reach the egg.

**DIAGRAM TO SHOW THE WOMAN'S VAGINA, WOMB, OVARIES AND EGG TUBE.**



your next period. You should keep a calendar and mark off the days when you have your period. This way you will know when to expect your period, and you can work out when those 13th, 14th and 15th days before your period are. It is very important that you know this because these are the days that you are fertile, and can get pregnant. But do not have sex too often during this time. Have sex on every second day. If you have sex too often, the man's sperm becomes weak.

**How Should You Have Sex If You Want To Make A Baby?**

If you want to make a baby, when you have sex the man's penis should go deep inside the woman's vagina. After he has an orgasm, in other words, when he lets his sperm go, he must take his penis out of his partner's vagina straightaway. The woman must lie on her back for an hour. She should keep her knees up close to her chest.

**How Can The Doctors Tell If You Are Infertile?**

There are many tests that should be done if you are infertile. There are many ways in which you could be helped with your problem. But in South Africa today many of these are not available to working class men and women. Government hospitals and clinics often don't take this problem of infertility seriously.

Even those who do take it seriously cannot do much as there are few facilities available in government hospitals. It is our right for the problem of infertility to be taken seriously. We have to fight to make sure that the government puts money into providing the facilities that can help us with infertility.

When a doctor is helping you with infertility she will talk to you carefully, and ask you questions about your problem of not being able to have a baby. Then the doctor will examine both you and your partner.

The woman has an examination. The doctor will put her fingers into the woman's vagina and feel the womb and the ovary. Then she will put a speculum into her vagina to look at the opening of the womb, which is called the cervix.

**The Problem May Lie With The Man And The Women Together**

The problem of infertility may be with both the man and the woman as a couple. These are some of the causes:

- \* Sometimes couples do not know the best time to make love so that they can make a baby.
- \* Sometimes they also do not know the best way to have sex if they want a baby.

**When Is The Best Time To Make A Baby?**

If your periods are regular, you produce an egg 14 days before the beginning of your next period. This happens whether your periods are far apart or close together. The best time to have sex is the 13th, 14th, and 14th days before

Keep a calendar and mark off the days of your periods. This way you can work out when you are fertile.

JANUARY							FEBRUARY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6					1	2	3
7	X	X	X	X	X	13	4	X	X	X	X	X	10
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
28	29	30	31				25	26	27	28			

She may also do a PAP smear test.

The doctor may take some blood tests. The man is asked to put his sperm into a jar. The sperm are checked to make sure they are strong and that there are enough sperm.

If all these tests are normal, more tests are done on the woman. Some of the mucus from her cervix is checked after she has sex. This test shows whether or not the sperm can get through the mucus, and can live in the mucus.

The next test that is done is to check that the woman's tubes are not blocked. The doctor will do an X-ray of the womb and the tubes. If the doctors see a blockage on the X-ray they will do another test called a laparoscopy. With this test the woman is put to sleep with an anaesthetic, and the doctor looks inside her tummy with a long thin camera. The doctor only needs to make a tiny cut to do this. Then they can see blockages in the tubes.

### How Can Infertility Be Treated?

If the problem lies with the man, it is often difficult to treat. Depending on his problem, it may help to use medicine to make his sperm stronger. But this is not usually very successful. If the man's sperm are weak, it may help to collect some of his sperm, and for the doctor to push them through the cervix and into the womb with a syringe. This can also help if the mucus from the cervix is killing the sperm. If the man's sperm are too weak to make a baby, sperm can be taken from another man, a donor, and put into the woman. This is called artificial insemination.

If the woman's tubes are blocked, it may be possible to do an operation to unblock them. The problem of blocked tubes is common. The operation to unblock them is not always successful.

A woman who does not make an egg each month can take tablets, or have an injection to help this to happen.

In some cases, doctors can do an operation to make a 'test tube baby'. To make a test tube baby, ripe eggs are taken from the woman's

ovary and mixed with the man's sperm in a glass dish. They are left to grow together. If the sperm and egg join together, the egg is put back into the woman's womb so that the baby can go on growing normally. Unfortunately, expensive treatments like injections and test tube babies are usually done by private doctors in private hospitals. Like many other treatments in this country you have to be rich to get them.

### Don't Give Up Hope!

For every one in ten couples, no reasons can be found for their infertility. Some of these couples will fall pregnant without help from doctors and even those couples with a problem can sometimes get pregnant without any further treatment. If you still don't get pregnant, you can think about adopting a baby. But never give up hope. Many couples do get pregnant even when they had given up all hope. Here's hoping for you!

Infertility affects many people, rich and poor. And it can cause great sadness for men and women. It should not be only the rich who can overcome infertility. Help must be available for all men and women, no matter what their colour or class. This is one of our rights that we have to fight for.

