

Fertility, Body Image and Eating Disorders



What is infertility and fertility care?

If you've been having difficulty falling pregnant and have been trying for over 12 months (or 6 months for people over 35), you might be experiencing infertility. Infertility issues impact an estimated one in every six people of reproductive age worldwide¹.

How does it affect body image and eating disorders?

Research tells us that women experiencing infertility or seeking fertility care are significantly more likely to experience body image issues, disordered eating or an eating disorder.

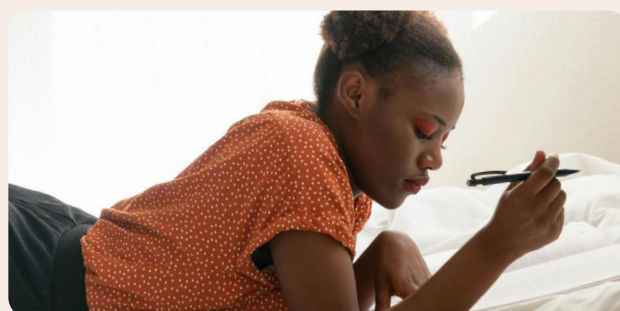
48%

of women seeking fertility treatment experience disordered eating²

5%

(1 in 20) women experiencing fertility challenges have Bulimia Nervosa (2.5 times more likely than the general female population)²

While not everyone who experiences fertility challenges will develop disordered eating or an eating disorder, people who are already susceptible to eating disorders may be at greater risk due to the lack of control over your fertility and body, intense focus on health, diet and weight and the physical and psychological changes that happen during fertility treatment.



“I never thought my fertility treatment would set off my disordered eating habits, but I really struggled with the dietary advice I was given and constant focus on my weight...” - Lisa

Tips to help support your wellbeing during fertility care

Choose a supportive fertility treatment provider

Ask them how they will offer you holistic and inclusive care that promotes your physical and mental well-being.

Communicate with your care team

Tell your provider about any previous history or concerns around body image, disordered eating or eating disorders. There is no shame in sharing this part of your story, and it will help your provider make sure they're giving you the right care.

Understand the fertility treatment process

To reduce anxiety and foster a sense of control, learn about the potential processes and treatments you'll be going through, as well as the physical, psychological and emotional impacts these may have on you.

Know your rights

Remember that you have choice and control over every step of your fertility journey. You can ask not to be weighed, question any health advice you are given, be provided with an explanation for all treatment recommendations, refuse any treatment, intervention or physical contact and report any abuse, neglect and discrimination.

Establish healthy coping mechanisms

Make self-care a priority throughout your fertility care journey to manage anxiety and encourage self-compassion.

Be aware of health and diet advice

Avoid making excessive changes to your diet or exercise routine and question any weight loss or diet recommendations as this can cause the body undue harm. Instead find nutrition support from eating disorder-informed dietitians and mental health professionals.

Reach out for help

Whether it's asking friends and family for support with care giving duties, finding a support person to attend appointments with you, requesting personal leave from work or seeking psychological support.

Get support



Call Butterfly National Helpline

1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)

or visit [Butterfly.org.au](https://butterfly.org.au)
to chat online or email,

7 days a week, 8am-midnight
(AEST/AEDT).



Learn More

Learn more from
NEDC's Mind, Body
& Fertility handbook

[Nedc.com.au](https://nedc.com.au)



Resources

Read stories of lived
experience and find
useful resources at

[Butterfly.org.au/women](https://butterfly.org.au/women)



References

- 1 World Health Organization. Infertility. World Health Organization. 2020. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/infertility>
- 2 Liptember Foundation, 2024. Uncovering the reality: examining multi-dimensional aspects of women's mental health in Australia, 2024.