

Fertility/Infertility

What is Infertility?

Infertility is when a couple cannot get pregnant (conceive), despite having regular unprotected sex. Around one in six couples in the UK will experience difficulties conceiving, this is approximately 3.5 million people across the country. There are many potential causes of infertility, with fertility problems affecting males and females. However, sometimes it can be difficult to find the cause.

The emotional impact of infertility can be huge and can have a significant impact on your mental health and wellbeing. Feelings of sadness, frustration, isolation, tearfulness, inadequacy, guilt, and anger are all common.

If you haven't been successful after 12 months of trying to get pregnant, you should consult your GP. If you are aged over 35 or know that you have a fertility problem, you should seek help earlier.

Self-help advice for looking after your mental health and wellbeing

Fertility treatment (known as IVF) is a long process, with highs and lows along the way. Looking after your mental and physical health is important. Getting enough sleep at night, eating well and being physically active are all steps you can take that can have big improvements in your overall health.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are five steps we can all take, to protect and look after our mental health and wellbeing. You could try out some of the following suggestions to build the Five Ways to Wellbeing into your day:

1. **Connect** with other people- We get positive benefits from connecting with people around us. You may want to join a support group giving you an opportunity to get information and support, discuss services, listen to expert talks, and speak to others who really understand what you are going through. Talking to friends and family may be helpful, there are a lot of emotions that come up during IVF and it can help finding some support. If you are having fertility treatment at a licensed centre, then you should have access to counselling services there. Do use them, they are there to help you.
2. **Be Active** – Being physically active is good for our bodies and minds. Being active releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good. You could go for a walk or do an exercise class if you are able (if unsure, speak to your GP or other health professional before starting).
3. **Take Notice** – Paying attention to the present moment (also known as mindfulness) improves your mental wellbeing. You might feel stressed and find mindfulness or meditation helpful. Visit your local library and ask for the Reading Well Books. There are books on mindfulness and stress which you can borrow for free. If you have access to the internet, you can find details of all the Reading Well books on the Melo website. Use the QR code below or go to www.melo.cymru and search 'Reading

Well.' There can be a lot that demands your attention during fertility investigations and treatment, and it's important to spend time doing something just for yourself. That might mean getting acupuncture or a massage, taking a relaxing bath, or lighting some candles.

4. **Keep Learning** – Learning new skills can improve your confidence and self-esteem. You could rediscover an old hobby or try a new one. Try a new recipe or learn to fix something.
5. **Give** – Doing something nice for a friend or a stranger is not only good for them, but it is also good for you. Expert studies suggest that being kind to others can help improve your mental wellbeing. It can give you a sense of purpose and self-worth and creating positive feelings. You could volunteer for a charity or do something to help someone out. If you have a partner, they may also have higher than normal stress levels whilst going through the rollercoaster ride of investigations and treatments. It is important to talk to each other and to share your feelings. Remember, being kind to yourself is just as important.

Fertility Network UK provides free and impartial support, advice, information and understanding for anyone affected by fertility issues. They can help anyone who is trying to conceive, going through treatment, or living without children. They know there is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to fertility, so that's why they offer a wide range of resources and support, including peer support groups, a support line as well as fertility factsheets.

If you are struggling with your mental health and wellbeing because of fertility issues, or just want advice you can contact them by phone or email. Their contact details are overleaf. Or if you, or someone you know, can access the internet, you can find advice and information on their website. Search for the Fertility Network UK website.

Fertility Network Wales

Support Lines Open 10am to 4pm. Monday, Wednesday, or Friday phone Diane on **0121 3235025** or email: support@fertilitynetworkuk.org. Tuesday and Thursday phone Janet on **07816 086694** or email janet@fertilitynetworkuk.org.

If you are worried about how you are feeling and want help:

- And live in Wales, phone **NHS Mental Health 111 and choose Option 2**. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is free to call from a mobile (even when the caller has no credit left) or from a landline. The service will provide immediate support over the phone to help you cope with how you are feeling, and if needed, a referral to mental health services will be arranged.
- If you live in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) area, and **are aged over 18**, you can contact your GP surgery to make an appointment with a **Psychological Health**

Practitioner (PHP). PHPs are NHS mental health practitioners that are available at most GP surgeries in the ABUHB area. They provide a free service for people experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems. Appointments can be either face to face, or over the phone.

- C.A.L.L. Mental Health Helpline for Wales provides a confidential mental health listening and support service. It is **open 24/7/365**. Call **0800 132 737** or text 'help' to **81066**.
- Shout UK is a **24/7 text service, free** on all major mobile networks. Available for anyone in crisis **anytime, anywhere**. Text 'shout' to **85258**.
- Samaritans provide a confidential listening line. They can be contacted **24/7** if you are struggling to cope and need someone to talk to. Call: **116 123** (free from any phone) You can also call the Samaritans Welsh Language Line (free from any phone) on **0808 164 0123** (7pm–11pm every day).

Accessing support online

If you or someone you know can access information online, please visit www.melo.cymru and search for '**Fertility**' for further information. Melo is Aneurin Bevan University Health Board's website and contains information, advice, and free self-help resources to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing. It also contains free courses that can be completed at home and in your own time.

Accessing fertility information online

There are digital resources on the Melo website.

If you or someone you know can access information online, please visit <https://www.melo.cymru/topic/fertility/> for further information and advice on fertility.

Alternatively, please scan the QR code on the right.

