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# Is the Secret to Getting Pregnant in Your Genes?

By *Korin Miller* | May 10, 2016



Whether you know you want to get pregnant at some point or are actually starting to try, it's normal to be a little worried about the whole thing. After all, we all know someone who has struggled to conceive. But if it's in your family history, could you also have trouble getting pregnant?

Experts say it depends. "More often than not, it is completely unrelated," says Shannon M. Clark, M.D., an associate professor of maternal-fetal medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch

and founder of [BabiesAfter35.com](http://BabiesAfter35.com). Meaning, just because it took your sister a year to get pregnant doesn't mean the same will happen with you.

Fertility specialist [Daniel Rychlik, M.D.](#), of [Southern California Reproductive Center](#) points out that there are a lot of other important factors that have nothing to do with your genes that go into whether it will be easy for you to get pregnant, like how old you are when you start trying. Women only have so many eggs, he explains, and we lose them exponentially with each menstrual cycle. However, some women are born with more than others and there seems to be a hereditary component to it.

"If you wait to get pregnant and start pushing the limits of your genes, then you might uncover infertility that's there," he says.

But experts say there can be some known conditions that can impact your ability to get pregnant and are related to genetics. If you notice these fertility-disruptors in your family tree, there's a chance it could take you a little longer than usual to get pregnant:

**Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS):** PCOS is "one of the most common causes of female infertility," says Clark. And, unfortunately, a combination of genes and environmental factors can lead to a woman developing it. "There is a strong genetic basis for this condition, but how it is inherited is uncertain," Clark says. So, if your sister has PCOS, it's probably a good idea to get yourself checked.

**Endometriosis:** You've likely heard about *Girls* star Lena Dunham's struggle with the painful disease, which can cause infertility. Luckily, having endometriosis doesn't mean you won't be able to have kids one day (Clark notes that 60 percent of women with endometriosis aren't infertile). There is a genetic component to the condition, though it's not overwhelmingly strong—if a first-degree relative like your mom or sister has the condition, there's a five to seven percent chance you'll have endometriosis as well.

**Uterine Fibroids:** These noncancerous tumors can occur within the different layers of the uterus and can cause abnormal vaginal bleeding, pelvic pain, and *yup*, infertility. Doctors don't know exactly what causes fibroids to form, Clark says, but there is likely a genetic basis to it.

**Premature Ovarian Insufficiency or Failure:** This condition refers to a loss of the normal function of your ovaries before age 40. Women with premature ovarian insufficiency don't ovulate regularly and sometimes don't ovulate at all. "Oftentimes, when we find a woman who has premature ovarian failure, we'll test her sister," says Rychlik. "A large percent of the time, that sister is going to have compromised fertility or even premature ovarian failure."

If you have concerns—whether or not your sister or mom had these conditions—experts say it's important to talk to your doctor. Your doc can determine whether your sister's troubles in conceiving could potentially affect you as well and whether or not additional testing needs to be performed, Clark says. Rychlik says there's also a simple blood test your ob/gyn can do to determine your ovarian health. "It's just a good thing to do," he says. "Then you can know whether you're OK or may want to look into other options."

But Clark stresses that you really should keep your stress about getting pregnant in check: "Unless there is a legitimate reason or known condition that a woman may have that could potentially affect her conceiving, she should approach trying to conceive with an open mind and a positive attitude."

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