



## WHAT CAUSES LOW SPERM COUNT?

**I am trying to have a baby. My husband and I were tested for fertility. My doctor said I am fine. My husband's doctor said that his sperm count is on the low side because the pH of the fluid is on the high side (8.3). What could cause this and how can it be fixed? Some suggestions would be helpful. We have to wait 2 months to discuss the test results with our fertility doctor. Our doctor did reassure us that the cause was not life threatening, that is the only reason I am willing to wait that long to find out what the problem is. My husband doesn't use drugs, he smokes cigarettes and is an occasional drinker (maybe 3 or 4 beers a month). He's very healthy and fit. We realize that this forum is no substitute for the real thing but the sooner we get this fixed, the sooner we can have our little angel.**

When looking at the causes of infertility, 40% of the time the cause is the male (known as male factor infertility). Therefore, performing a semen analysis during the workup of infertility is commonplace. Low sperm counts are also known as oligospermia. The pH of semen is often measured, but is not usually of much help when evaluating unexplained male factor infertility.

The most common cause of low sperm count is the presence of a varicocele. A varicocele is an abnormal dilation of the veins within the spermatic cord. Treatment for this disorder is surgical, although the sperm counts do not always improve after treatment. Approximately 40% to 50% of the time there is no explanation for low sperm counts.

If an abnormal sperm count is noted on semen analysis, it is important to repeat this test at least one or two more times. Sperm counts may vary significantly from specimen to specimen. Additionally, a period of abstaining from ejaculation for up to 3 days is best before obtaining the sample. The results will be more accurate.

Other causes of low sperm counts include testicular injury, prior testicular surgery, prior mumps, exposure to excessive heat, exposure to radiation, heavy marijuana or alcohol use, certain medications, use of anabolic steroids, certain anatomic abnormalities, certain endocrine abnormalities, etc. Your physician will obtain a detailed history and run multiple tests in an attempt to determine the cause of the low sperm count. Depending on the results of the testing, various treatments may be recommended.

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