

Research reveals lifestyle maintenance tips for infertile individuals

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Monash University researchers have identified the barriers faced by people experiencing infertility to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and have suggested practical solutions to enhance skills and boost confidence to

improve overall health.

They found that people with [infertility](#) identified a lack of knowledge and opportunity around the following, which held them back from maintaining a [healthy diet](#) and regular exercise:

- evidence-based diet and exercise strategies
- support and resources to strengthen self-management skills
- the mental health burden of living with infertility.

A [healthy lifestyle](#) is recommended in multiple clinical infertility guidelines and this is the first review to highlight the unique challenges faced by people with infertility. It will be used to develop lifestyle interventions to improve [health outcomes](#).

Published in *Human Reproduction Update*, the systematic [review](#) evaluated the perspectives of over 4,300 health care professionals and people with infertility.

Infertility, defined as the inability to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months of regular, unprotected sexual intercourse, affects up to 186 million individuals globally.

Joint senior author, Associate Professor Lisa Moran, Accredited Practicing Dietitian and Head of the Healthy Lifestyle Research Program at the Monash Center for Health Research and Implementation (MCHRI), said that the impact of undergoing fertility treatments could exacerbate the challenges of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This meant equipping people with skills to feel empowered was critical.

"Undertaking fertility treatment is a tough journey and this review found that people who have infertility and want to follow a healthy lifestyle want to feel like they are capable of doing this," Associate Professor

Moran said. "Self-management skills boost confidence and so incorporating skills like [goal setting](#) and problem-solving are key to successful lifestyle change."

"Support from a health professional is also very important, and we found that health professionals enjoy motivating and supporting patients to achieve their goals."

Barriers affecting opportunities for lifestyle improvement included not having the time to exercise and a lack of evidence-based and good-quality information to guide dietary changes.

Joint senior author and Accredited Practicing Dietitian, Dr. Steph Cowan, said that enhancing opportunity by involving the support of a partner, offering resources at no or little cost and supporting delivery via telehealth could help some people.

"Telehealth can reduce some logistical challenges and can also lower anxiety for people who are going in person to a fertility clinic," Dr. Cowan said. "Alternatively, for those receiving in-person care, providing take-home, easy-to-understand evidence-based information means that people don't need to choose between their health, time and money."

First author and Ph.D. candidate, Sophia Torkel, said infertility has mental health impacts that can be profound and varied, affecting individuals and couples in different ways. The mental-health burdens of living with infertility make achieving even small changes in lifestyle behavior difficult.

"We found that reframing a healthy lifestyle as a self-care strategy is an important mental health strategy that can help drive behavior change," she said.

The findings will be incorporated into a new Ask Fertility App, which is being developed by the Center of Research Excellence in Women's Health in Reproductive Life and MCHRI. It adds to the suite of Ask Apps which include Ask Early Menopause (6000+ users) and Ask PCOS (61,000+ users in 195 countries).

The Ask Fertility App, due to be launched later this year, will help women with infertility find information of the highest quality from leading experts and will include [self-care](#), self- management and shared decision-making tools.

"Together with recommendations from international guidelines, the findings of this research can help to improve the health of people with infertility, which we hope will contribute to achieving better fertility outcomes," Associate Professor Moran said.

More information: Sophia Torkel et al, Barriers and enablers to a healthy lifestyle in people with infertility: a mixed-methods systematic review, *Human Reproduction Update* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/humupd/dmae011](#)

Provided by Monash University

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