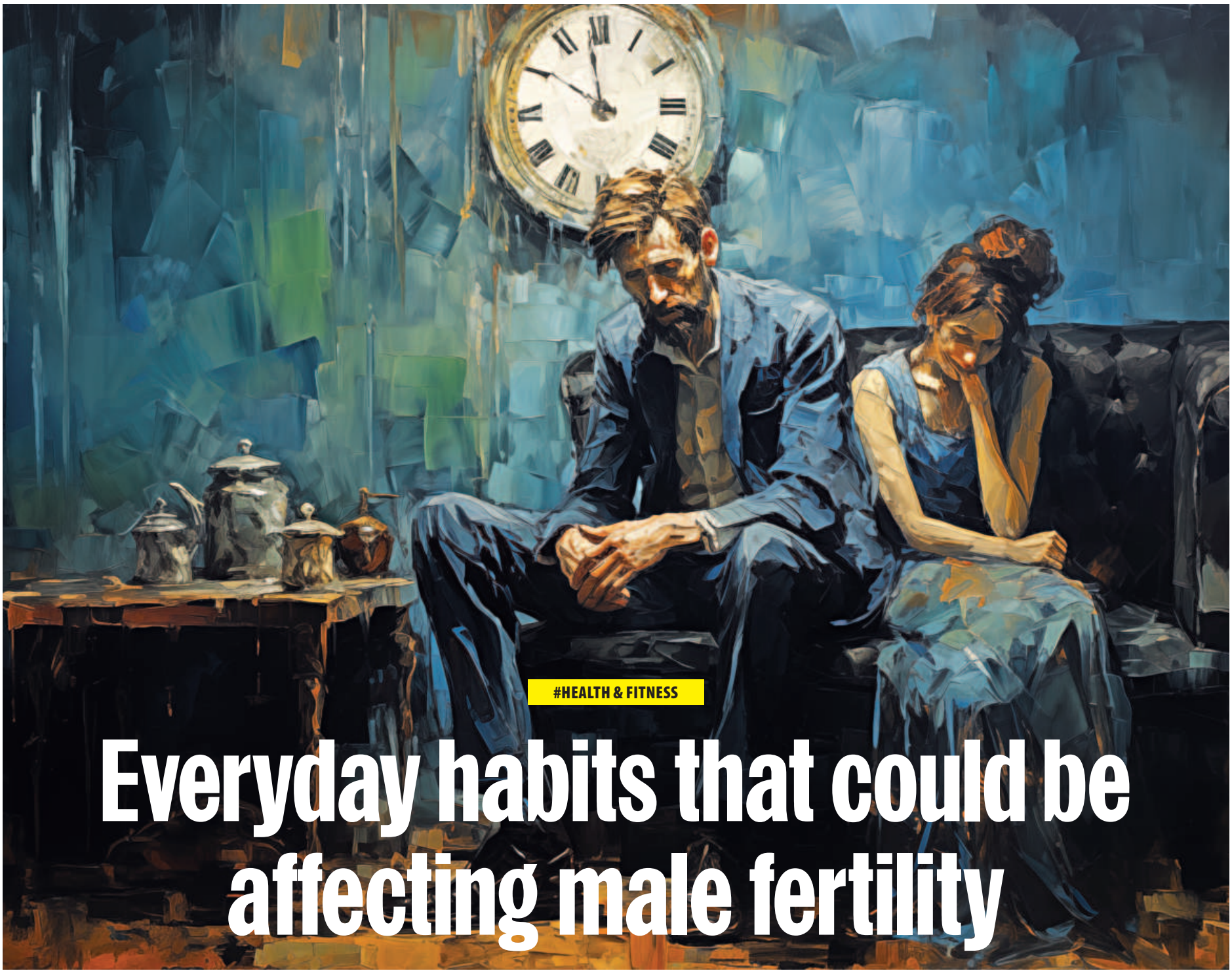


#HEALTH & FITNESS

Everyday habits that could be affecting male fertility

When a couple waits months or years for good news, the questions usually go to the wife. The husband rarely gets asked, even though the cause can lie with him.

Doctors use the term when a couple has regular, unprotected sex for a year or more without a pregnancy. In a man, it means his body is unable to make a healthy partner pregnant.

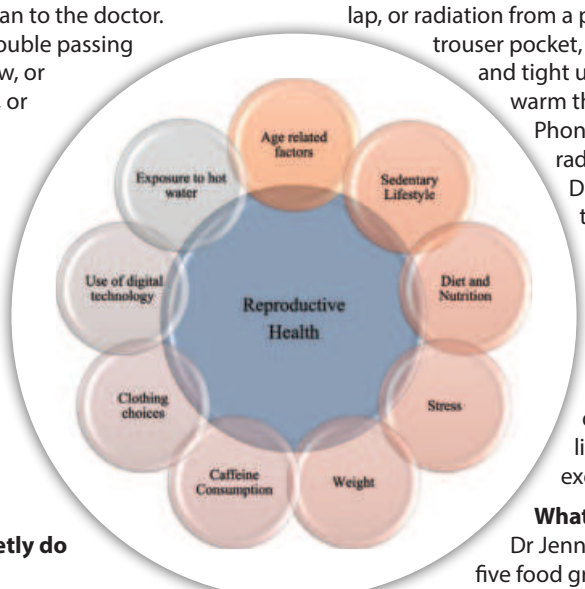
Dr Fahim Ara Khanom Jenny, Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Sylhet Women's Medical College, says it is time men took part in the conversation.

What can go wrong?

According to Dr Jenny, the trouble usually starts in one of four places. The body may not be making healthy sperm, the passage sperm travel through may be blocked, the sperm may not reach the right place, or the fluid that carries them may have problems.

Other common causes include obesity, thyroid trouble, hormone imbalance, and difficulty getting or keeping an erection. Some medicines, including those for high blood pressure and mental health, can also play a part. So can age, and so can infections, whether recent or long past. They can lower sperm quality, upset hormones, or block the passage.

Dr Jenny also lists warning signs that should send a man to the doctor. These include trouble passing urine, a weak flow, or a lump, swelling, or heavy feeling in the testicles. Chest pain, breathlessness, blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss, constant tiredness, low mood, and extreme thirst also need checking.



Habits that quietly do the damage

Smoking, alcohol, and drugs lower the number of sperm, slow their movement, change their shape, and damage the genetic material inside them.

Stress and poor sleep hurt too. They disturb the body's hormones and put it under strain, and that affects sperm.

Heat is another culprit. A laptop on the lap, or radiation from a phone in the trouser pocket, long hot baths, and tight underwear all warm the testicles. Phones also give off radio waves, which Dr Jenny says add to the problem.

Weight and exercise matter as well. Being overweight hurts sperm health, and so does doing too little or too much exercise.

What to eat

Dr Jenny points to five food groups: Salmon, mackerel, and sardines supply omega-3 fats and zinc. Walnuts, pumpkin seeds and chia add fibre, magnesium and selenium. Spinach, kale, broccoli and chard bring folate and vitamin K. Blueberries, pomegranates and tomatoes offer antioxidants, while lentils, chickpeas, quinoa and oats provide fibre and plant protein.

What to cut back

Processed red meat such as sausages, hot dogs, and salami is on her list, along with fizzy drinks, energy drinks, sweetened tea, and refined pastries. Too much alcohol and caffeine should also be avoided, because they can damage the genetic material in sperm.

On supplements, she prefers getting vitamins and minerals from food. If you are thinking of taking pills, speak to a doctor first.

How long until it works?

Sperm take time to renew, so the benefits of a better lifestyle arrive slowly. Dr Jenny says results settle in about 6 to 12 months. If nothing improves after that, medical treatment is the next step.

Her advice is simple. Look after your sleep, weight, and diet; keep your body cool; and give up smoking. If a year passes with no change, book a proper check-up.

By Zawad Arif Arian