

How fathers' diets, lifestyle choices could impact their babies' health

[E]merging science indicates that fathers play a more significant role in pregnancy outcomes than previously thought.

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Traditionally, the father's role in reproduction focused on the preconception period — whether his sperm was potent enough to fertilize the female egg. These days, thanks to a decades-long decline in sperm counts, such concerns have moved to the front burner. The evidence that environmental toxins, especially endocrine disruptors (chemicals often found in common items such as personal-care products and plastic containers), [may contribute to male infertility](#) is compelling. Lifestyle habits [such as smoking](#) and [excessive alcohol intake](#) as well as [nutrient-deficient diets](#) have also been linked to sperm robustness.

The question is, do low sperm counts or damaged sperm actually have an impact on pregnancy outcomes? The answer is yes. For instance, we know that sperm helps to determine how well the placenta forms — a key factor in fetal development — and that impaired sperm dramatically increases the likelihood of miscarriage, possibly because it is known to contain high levels of free radicals. Moreover, thanks to the science of epigenetics, we are learning that human sperm may carry “biological memories” of abnormalities that can be transferred to offspring.

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