

\_HEALTH AND SAFETY

# Why You May Want to Hide the Ibuprofen Bottle From Your Husband If You Are Trying to Get Pregnant

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Getting pregnant is not a walk in the park for every couple who dreams of becoming parents. According to the CDC, one in 8 couples (or 12 percent of married women) in the United States have trouble getting pregnant or carrying a pregnancy to term. Approximately one-third of infertility is attributed to the female partner, one-third to the male partner, and one-third is caused by a combination of problems in both partners or is unexplained.

If a couple is struggling to get pregnant, the last thing they want is another component in their lives that could inhibit fertility. Now a new study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has shocked many by concluding that one of the most common over-the-counter medications used – ibuprofen – can impact male fertility.

Every day millions of people turn to ibuprofen to relieve headaches, fever symptoms, joint pain, muscle aches, and more. We are now learning that this pain reliever can have a negative impact on the testicles of young men. This current study was a follow up to previous research that explored the health effects as a result of pregnant women taking any one of three mild pain relievers: aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen. Those studies showed that when taken during pregnancy, all three medicines increased the likelihood that male babies would be born with congenital malformations of their testicles. Therefore, these drugs are anti-androgenic, which means they disrupt male hormones.

Following those studies, scientists wanted to explore if the medications would directly affect grown men. The research team recruited 31 male volunteers between the ages of 18 and 35. Fourteen of them were given a daily dose of ibuprofen: 600 milligrams twice a day, which is the maximum limit per instructions on ibuprofen bottles. The remaining 17 volunteers were given a placebo.

Within 14 days, the men taking ibuprofen showed a decrease in the level of luteinizing hormones, which is a sign of dysfunctional testicles associated with infertility. The researchers are not yet sure if the effects from the ibuprofen will be reversible over time.

Although small, this study is especially important because most drugs are not evaluated for their effects on human male fertility. However, one of the scientists involved in the study told CNN that there is evidence that some medications are harmful to the male reproductive system, including testosterone, opioids, antidepressants, antipsychotics, immune modulators, and even the over-the-counter antacid cimetidine (Tagamet).

Yet these adverse effects are rarely communicated to patients. Therefore, this news about ibuprofen and infertility may bring attention to the use of certain medications and help many couples who hope to be parents someday. It is also critical because a father's use of ibuprofen may impact his children as well.

Overall, experts recommend that men who are planning to father a child should avoid ibuprofen and the other drugs shown to influence fertility. Although this new study indicates that ibuprofen disrupts the reproductive hormones in healthy young men, it is also possible that there is an even greater negative effect in men who already experience low fertility.

Finally, we will have to keep a look out for additional studies to see if taking common medications like ibuprofen can impact young boys and adolescent boys. Is it possible that taking ibuprofen for a headache at a young age can later impact that boy's chance of becoming a dad? Every parent will certainly want to know the answer to that question.



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