Can ovarian cysts cause infertility? [1]

Dear Alice,

Both me and my husband are at Columbia University. I was recently diagnosed with ovarian functional cysts that are about one inch long each, in both ovaries. We are starting to think about having a baby. Do you think that having those cysts in my ovaries would decrease my chances of becoming pregnant? Thank you very much for your response.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Ovarian cysts are usually a common and harmless swelling of one or both ovaries. These cysts most often occur in women who are between puberty and menopause, when the ovaries are in high gear propelling out mature eggs. The term “functional” means that the cyst is not caused by any underlying disease or disorder, and that it will likely resolve itself (shrink and disappear) within a few weeks. Even better news is that a functional ovarian cyst (or two) will probably not give you and your husband problems conceiving.

Some functional ovarian cysts have no symptoms and are discovered, if at all, during routine pelvic exams. Others can cause symptoms, including:

- Changes in the menstrual cycle, including shorter or longer periods, skipped periods, and/or spotting between periods
- Pelvic pain or ache, especially during sexual intercourse or at the start or finish of menstruation
- Feelings of nausea or queasiness
- Breast tenderness

Because these symptoms can also be the sign of a more serious health problem, any changes in menstruation or prolonged abdominal pain need to be checked by a health care provider to rule out conditions that require treatment or further evaluation. Your health care provider from Columbia Health [2] is a good place to start. This way, you begin building a relationship with someone you trust to answer your questions, someone who already has certain medical info about you.

Most ovarian cysts disappear with no treatment at all. Aside from waiting it out, benign cysts can sometimes be treated with alternative therapies, such as hormone therapy, stress
reduction techniques, acupuncture, dietary modifications and/or herbal remedies. However, if it is recommended that you need surgery to remove a cyst, it is a good idea to discuss pregnancy plans with your surgeon. S/he can help you understand the procedure better, and what the impact might be. Remember, a woman can be fertile with only one ovary, or with even one part of an ovary. Referral to a fertility specialist may be in order depending on your own unique situation.

Alice!
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