Sperm Counts Keep Declining in U.S. and Europe, New Studies Say

They might have used different methodology and measurements, but two recent studies have come to the same conclusion – male fertility is on the decline. Both studies were premiered at the Scientific Congress of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) in Denver.

The first study is a collaborative effort between private fertility centers in New Jersey and Spain. This study looked at 120,000 men struggling with infertility and found that the percentage of men with a total motile sperm count (TMSC) of more than 15 million declined from 85 percent in 2002-05 to 79 percent in 2014-17. A TMSC under 15 million is considered low, and this study also found that the number of men with an extremely low TMSC (0 to 5 million) increased from 9 to more than 11.5 percent.

The second study comes from researchers at Mount Sinai's Icahn School of Medicine in conjunction with the California Cryobank and Reproductive Medicine Associates of New York. They looked at 124,000 sperm samples from 2,600 donors between 19-38 from various locations, including Los Angeles, Palo Alto, Houston, Boston, Indianapolis, and New York City. Testing sperm count, sperm concentration, and TMSC, researchers discovered that these numbers declined in almost every location from 2007 to 2017 (New York City was an exception for all three factors, while sperm counts in Boston showed no change).

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This is not news. Scientists from Hebrew University in Jerusalem found last year that sperm counts in the west have more than halved over the last forty years. The average rate

of yearly decline is 1.4 percent. At this point, the real news would be the discovery of why. Why are men in the developed world experiencing this loss of fertility? Science still don't know.

What We Need to Know

There are some theories as to how sperm counts and male fertility are declining in the western world. Some say the lack of exercise and increasing obesity play a part in decreased sperm numbers. Others point to the standard American diet, laced with sugar, soy, and other health-disrupting substances. Chemicals found in everyday items like Bis-Phenol A (BPA) are another common reason floated for the decline of male fertility. Add in smoking, stress, and drinking, and the causes of male infertility look like the textbook definition of an unhealthy lifestyle. Scientists haven't found the official link between infertility and this kind of lifestyle. This suggests there isn't one cause for the decline, though. All of these options are valid and correct. Together they form the conditions needed to effectively slow men's fertility in its tracks.

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Is This A Bad Thing?

As an environmentalist, I would love this news if the decrease in fertility wasn't caused by environmental toxicity. Fewer people means less strain on resources, and 2017 study found that potential parents lower carbon emissions equivalent to 58.6 tonnes of CO_2 emissions every year by having one fewer child. But lower sperm counts and decreased male fertility negatively affect the lives of the men dealing with them. Individuals struggling with infertility are more likely to develop diabetes, substance abuse disorders, or heart

conditions. In a way that strains resources as well, especially in the U.S., where health care costs are a heavy burden on the population. Maybe we should treat infertility as a lifestyle problem, rather than a medical one. Let’s see that study.

Sources:

- *Sperm Counts Continue to Fall* – The Atlantic
- *Study Finds Declining Sperm Counts in Houston and Other Cities* – Houston Public Media
- *Sperm counts of Western men plummeting, analysis finds* – CNN
- *The infertility crisis is beyond doubt. Now scientists must find the cause* – The Guardian