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# A&M veterinary professor makes discoveries in human fertility field

## Researcher calculates conception based on sperm count levels

By Melissa Naumann  
Of The Battalion Staff

Having a baby just got a little easier. Thanks to a study by a Texas A&M researcher in the College of Veterinary Medicine, couples have a better chance of knowing the best time to conceive.

Dr. Larry Johnson, in a 1988 study conducted for the National Institutes of Health Institute on Aging, found that the best time to conceive can be figured by determining when a man has a higher sperm count in his ejaculate as well as when a woman ovulates.

Johnson, who teaches histology to first-year vet students, studied the testes of 38 men who died from traumatic injuries or heart failure to avoid examining men who had low sperm rates due to disease or sickness. He counted the sperm in each testis, finding that men with higher sperm production rates had the same number of sperm in their epididymis as men with lower sperm production rates.

A normal sperm production rate is between 150 and 200 million a

**"Inhibitors are released to prevent swimming, to make the sperm stay as quiescent as possible until it's time to get in there and fight for that egg."**

— Dr. Larry Johnson,  
Texas A&M Professor

day, and a low rate is considered to be less than 50 million a day.

Johnson said the epididymis, a structure lying between the testis and vas deferens (part of the ejaculatory duct) that is important in the maturing process of sperm, is not as efficient in moving smaller amounts of sperm as it is in moving larger amounts of sperm.

He compared the movement of sperm through the epididymis to

milk in a long plastic bag. If the bag is filled with milk and squeezed at the bottom, a lot of the milk would come out the first time the bag was squeezed. As the bag is squeezed more, less comes out, showing that the bag operates better with more milk in it.

This means that the sperm of men who have lower sperm production rates may remain in the epididymis longer, getting older. As sperm get older in the man's body, they become less likely to survive the journey through the woman's body to fertilize the egg. In fact, to keep the sperm calm to conserve their energy, the epididymis releases inhibitors, Johnson said.

"Inhibitors are released to prevent swimming, to make the sperm stay as quiescent as possible until it's time to get in there and fight for that egg," he said.

Men with high sperm production rates have sperm that move quickly through the epididymis, showing that sperm maturation is not as important as it was thought to be or that sperm maturation occurs more

quickly than previously believed, Johnson said.

In a 1982 study, Johnson found that human sperm reserves are relatively small since they can be depleted quickly and then replenished quickly. Studying semen samples over five days, it was necessary to stabilize the amount of sperm in each sample. If a man had a very usually active weekend, sperm reserves would be low, while a man who had a less active weekend would have more sperm reserves. Johnson determined that two days were necessary to compute the sperm production rate.

"You have to stabilize the tank before you can know the production rate," he said.

Two days is relatively quick, but this stabilization to occur since men usually need five to seven days, Johnson said.

In related research, Johnson is examining the architectural makeup of the testes and the reasons (exercise, age) why some men produce more sperm than others, including alcohol and drug use and occupation.

# Quaker urges FDA to use uniform standards

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Quaker Oats Co., which is defending a Texas lawsuit over health claims of its cereals, Wednesday urged the Food and Drug Administration to adopt uniform food description standards.

"America needs a single, clear and scientifically based national standard for food product information," Katherine E. Smith, vice president of consumer affairs for Quaker Oats, said.

She and more than 40 others testified before a four-member FDA panel conducting a public hearing on food labeling.

The United States is moving away from uniformity, she said, as states make different interpretations of federal food guidelines.

The Texas attorney general's office sued Quaker Oats in September, saying the nation's biggest seller of hot cereal misled consumers by advertising that its product can help reduce heart

disease risk by helping reduce cholesterol.

Quaker Oats says that oats, when used as part of a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet, can help reduce cholesterol levels even farther because of soluble fiber and other nutrients.

Smith said consumers need national uniformity in ingredient and nutritional labeling and health claims.

"It would almost be cost-prohibitive to maintain separate production capabilities, distribution centers, and in the end it would probably cost consumers more to have a variety of regulations," she said in an interview after her testimony.

Smith said, despite the Texas suit, Quaker Oats has not set up a different labeling procedure for the state, but said the potential is there.

Assistant Attorney General Steve Gardner,

while not directly mentioning the Quaker lawsuit, said food companies "for whatever reason, perhaps greed . . . are unable to avoid facing of the facts."

He said the recent surge in health claims to be traced to a 1987 FDA policy allowing expanded disease-prevention claims on food labels.

Gardner said the policy should be repealed. The Texas attorney general's office contends that such health claims constitute deceptive practices because not all information needed to explain the claim can be carried on a food label, Gardner said.

Wednesday's hearing in San Antonio was one of four being held throughout the nation to get public input on new food labeling policies.

FDA Commissioner Frank E. Young said label regulations will be put forth in April 1990.

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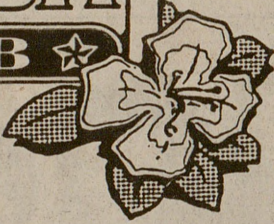
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Photo by Frederick D. Jr.

### Sweet dreams

Freshmen Jamie West, a general studies major from Taylor, and Jason Day, an aerospace engineering major from Austin, sleep outside the Academic Building Tuesday morning to get a good

place in line for honors registration, which began that day. The photo was taken at 2:10 a.m. "If they hadn't locked the doors we would be inside there," West said.

## DON'T MISS THE 2nd ANNUAL TEXAS A&M

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