Guide to Egg Donation

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter
September 8, 2011

Andrea Faison, PharmD Candidate, Dana Petri, PharmD
Kerr Health and UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy

Understanding Egg Donation

If couples are unable to have children using their own eggs and sperm, fertility medications, or donor sperm, the next step may be to investigate becoming pregnant by receiving donated eggs. A woman's eggs can be frozen if there is a concern that she may be unable to become pregnant at a later date; this may be due to age or medical circumstances such as chemotherapy. The procedure of freezing a woman's eggs is typically referred to as fertility preservation.

Types of Donors

There are two types of egg donors: anonymous and known. Anonymous donors are typically matched by finding a donor woman with features similar to the recipient. A few of the characteristics that are considered are ethnicity, height, and eye color, while some programs ask donors to provide information about their background and intelligence. An agreement can be made between the anonymous donor and the recipient about how involved the donor will be. The choices range from the recipient and donor never meeting to developing an ongoing relationship between the donor and the recipient.

Women who are unable to have a child may ask a relative or friend to be an egg donor. Many states require these known donors to undergo the same health screenings as anonymous donors. Health screenings for egg donors consist of a routine physical, gynecological exam, psychological evaluation, tests for various infectious diseases such as HIV and gonorrhea, and a check for genetic diseases.

Obtaining the Eggs

The egg donor will use fertility medications to control the timing of egg production and to increase the number of eggs her body produces at once. These eggs are monitored for development by ultrasound. When the eggs become mature, the donor is given another medication to cause them to release. About 36 hours later, the eggs are removed from the donor's ovaries through a short surgical procedure. The

uterus of the recipient of the donated eggs must be synchronized with the donor's reproductive cycle. Initially, the recipient's menstrual cycle is stopped, followed by a stimulation with hormones that matches the donor and recipient.

In vitro fertilization

After the eggs are obtained, the donor's eggs are introduced to sperm from the intended father though a process called in vitro fertilization (IVF). If the sperm and eggs form embryos, they are matured in a laboratory until the time of implantation into the uterus of the recipient - about three to five days later.

There may be risks to IVF and you should talk to your doctor if you have more concerns. Risks include cramping or bleeding from the embryo transfer and rarely some patients develop an infection. Multiple pregnancy (twins or more) is another risk with many fertility options, including IVF, although this has lessened with newer technology and the implantation of typically no more than 3 embryos at a time.

Additional Patient Resources:

Kerr Health Specialty Pharmacy:
wwww.kerrhealth.com/fertility OR 1-866-443-1904

Duke Fertility Clinic:
www.dukefertilitycenter.org OR 919-572-HOPE

UNC Fertility Clinic:
www.UNCfertility.org OR 919-966-1150

American Society for Reproductive Medicine:
www.ReproductiveFacts.org

References:

1. The New York State Task Force on Life and the Law. Becoming an Egg Donor. http://www.health.ny.gov/publications/1127/ [accessed 2011 Aug 22]
2. American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Third Party Reproduction (Sperm, egg, and embryo donation and surrogacy) A Guide for Patients. 2006. www.asrm.org [accessed 2011 Aug 22]
3. American Society for Reproductive Medicine. Patient Fact Sheet. Risks of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). 2007. www.asrm.org [accessed 2011 Aug 23]
4. Duke Fertility Center. Donor Egg Recipient Program. www.dukefertilitycenter.org [accessed 2011 Aug 23]
5. Overview of Fertility Preservation at UNC. UNC School of Medicine. http://www.med.unc.edu/fertilitypreservation [accessed 2011 Aug 23]
6. IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) Program. UNC School of Medicine. https://www.med.unc.edu/obgyn/specialty-services/UNC_fertility/assisted-reproductive-technologies-art [accessed 2011 Aug 23]