

Preparing for In-Vitro Fertilization: Tips for Managing Stress

Your Healthy News – Fertility Newsletter

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Many couples undergoing in-vitro fertilization (IVF) or other infertility treatments experience stress.^{1, 2} Infertility itself is a life-changing experience that carries unexpected stressors and potential stigmatization.¹ Infertility treatment is time consuming, physically demanding, financially costly, and emotionally taxing.² Certain couples dealing with infertility may experience changes in family relationships, social networks, as well as intra-marital frustration or anger.^{1, 2, 8}

Stress is the situation in which mental tension or physiological reaction develops in response to infertility or infertility treatment. Many patients undergoing infertility treatments report feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, and isolation.¹ Some patients experience a loss of appetite or trouble sleeping.^{1,2,8} It is important to be able to recognize these feelings and manage your stress.

What is Stressful about In-Vitro Fertilization?

There are multiple steps involved in all infertility treatments, and especially with IVF. If your doctor believes that you are a candidate for IVF, you will receive extensive education on all of the procedures and protocols regarding this treatment. The first step of IVF is stimulation of the ovaries to produce more eggs with medications taken orally and also injections you will need to give yourself. Blood work and multiple ultrasounds are required during this phase of treatment. The next step is retrieval of those eggs, which is usually done under sedation with an ultrasound probe. After the egg is retrieved from the woman, sperm is retrieved from the male, and both are combined in the laboratory so they will fertilize. After one or more embryos are transferred into the women's uterus, blood testing and ultrasounds will be done to determine if you are pregnant.^{3,4}

Additionally, the outcome of infertility treatment is unpredictable. Even after multiple cycles, there is no guarantee that you will conceive. All of these factors contribute to increased stress. As couples participate in further treatment cycles, the treatment duration will be longer and the level of stress could increase over time.^{3,4}

Why is Managing My Stress Important?

Stress has been shown to negatively impact infertility treatment. Some specialists believe that stress can prevent you from conceiving. Stress could also contribute to a patient's decision to stop infertility treatment. Finally, stress affects the patient's ability to cope with potential pregnancy loss and complications associated with pregnancy.^{4,5}

Relieving Stress

There are many techniques that can be implemented to reduce stress. General measures you can take to decrease stress include eating healthy, drinking less coffee and alcohol, and talking to people that can support and help you. Relaxation techniques are individualized methods you can develop for your specific needs to alleviate stress. A few examples are deep breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, meditation, and massage therapy. Your body will respond to relaxation techniques by lowering blood pressure, respiration rate, pulse, releasing muscle tension, and easing emotional tension.^{6, 7, 8} Another method of relieving stress is acupuncture; it is believed to reduce some of the physical side effects that arise with increased stress.^{9, 10}

Dealing with infertility and undergoing IVF can be a stressful time for individuals. It is important to be able to recognize when you are experiencing stress, as well as learning to deal with this stress. There are multiple relaxation techniques that can be implemented to reduce your level of stress. If you are having trouble coping with a stressful situation, it may be beneficial to seek additional professional help.

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