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29 Ways to Deal With Infertility

How to deal with the physical and emotional challenges of infertility while pursuing your dream of parenthood.



By Christine A. Smyczynski

Introduction

Approximately 20% of the reproductive age population suffers from infertility, the inability to achieve or maintain a pregnancy. In the United States that equals about one in every six couples, so it is a very common health problem. 29 Ways to Deal With Infertility will outline, in simple language, how to deal with infertility, from diagnosis to treatments, to the emotional impact. This book is meant to give you an overview of the problem, rather than cover it in great depth. "Resources" (Way #29) will list sources where you can explore this topic in greater detail. As with any health topic, this book is not meant to take the place of medical consultation.

While infertility is not life-threatening, those who experience it suffer both physically and emotionally. Often couples don't know where to turn for answers when dealing with this agonizing problem. This book will offer suggestions on understanding what infertility is all about, from finding the right doctor, to knowing what test and treatments are available and even offer tips on how to deal with well-meaning friends and family who keep asking, "When are you going to start a family?"

We hope that you find the information presented in the next 29 pages to be helpful as you deal with the issues surrounding your struggle with infertility.

About the Author

Christine Smyczynski is a writer and mother of four. Her and her husband, Jim, struggled with infertility for six years before giving birth to their first child.

1. What is Infertility?

Most people take for granted that they have the ability to have a child if they so desire. We tend to assume that getting pregnant is easy because we all know someone that has gotten pregnant "by accident." Many folks presume that an unprotected romantic encounter will lead to a baby nine months later.

In reality, it usually takes at least six months of well-timed, unprotected intercourse to achieve a pregnancy in most healthy couples with no reproductive problems. For the 20% of the reproductive age population with an infertility problem, it may take much longer or require medical intervention to make their dreams of becoming parents a reality. Of course, most people don't realize that they have an infertility problem until they begin trying to start a family.

Infertility is defined as the inability to achieve a pregnancy after one year of unprotected intercourse or the inability to carry a pregnancy to live birth. If the woman is over 35, an infertility problem is suspected after trying without success for six months. Infertility cuts across all socioeconomic levels and doesn't discriminate by race, religion or ethnic background.

Infertility is not just a "woman's problem." While 40% of cases can be attributed to the female factor, 40% can be attributed to the male. In about 10% of the cases, infertility is caused by a combination of factors in both partners. The remaining 10% have unexplained infertility; both partners show no apparent problem, yet pregnancy is still not achieved.

We had just put a down payment on our first house. After four years of marriage we decided that this would be a perfect time to start our family. Light-hearted, we figured out the right time of the month for conception and assumed that nine months later we'd be holding a baby in our arms. Much to our surprise, we did not conceive that month or anytime soon. It would be six long and very trying years before our first child was born.

Jim, Amherst, NY



2. Female Infertility

As mentioned earlier, in about 40% of the cases the infertility can be attributed to the female partner. Some of the more common female factors include:

1. Ovulation Disorders and Hormone Imbalances

In order to become pregnant, a woman must ovulate; which means that the ovaries release an egg to be fertilized by the man's sperm. For most women with a regular 28-day cycle, ovulation occurs around day 14. Women with irregular periods may ovulate earlier or later in the cycle. Some women may not ovulate at all, yet continue to menstruate with seemingly normal cycles

Hormones orchestrate the conception process, including ovulation, by sending "messages" to the reproductive organs. Follicle stimulating hormones (FSH) begin maturing the egg, while lutenizing hormones (LH) trigger the eggs release. When the egg is released, the body begins to produce estrogen and progesterone, which build up the uterine lining so that a fertilized egg may implant. Estrogen also increases the amount of cervical mucus, which allows for better penetration of the sperm. If hormone levels are imbalanced, it's unlikely that conception can occur. Insufficient hormone levels can also cause miscarriages after implantation.

2. Blocked Fallopian Tubes

When the egg is released from the ovary, it travels down to the uterus through the fallopian tubes. If the tube is blocked, the egg cannot get through and consequently, does not meet up with the sperm.

3. Endometriosis or Abdominal Adhesions

A build up of scar tissue, caused either by infection or previous abdominal surgery, can make it impossible for eggs to be released or the fallopian tubes to move towards the ovaries.

4. Other Causes

Other causes of female infertility include previous use of an IUD, use of medications that could interfere with fertility, chromosomal or genetic defects, chemotherapy, exposure to pesticides or other hazardous substances. Even the use of personal lubricants during lovemaking can prevent conception.

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