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# INFERTILITY

## *When It's Time to Turn for Help*

***If you are reading this, you have taken a big step. You have realized that after months, even years of trying, you have not achieved the family you and your partner had planned.***

You may have postponed starting a family, or maybe you didn't use contraception, feeling you would adjust to whatever happened, only nothing did. Maybe you thought you weren't having sex at the right time of the month. Feelings of frustration and inadequacy emerged.

Did you talk to your spouse/partner, your family, a friend? Just at a time when you might have benefited from the support of loved ones, you probably withdrew.

"Let's try a little harder," you might have said. Maybe you read an article in a magazine and bought a basal body thermometer. How soon after the temperature charting began did lovemaking become a regimented process of baby-making? Did you become pregnant only to have your hopes dashed by a miscarriage? Perhaps more than once? Or after having had one child some years ago you can't seem to have that hoped-for second child?

When you are facing an all-encompassing problem such as infertility, you can lose perspective. You can begin to feel that you are alone – that no one else is experiencing or has experienced this problem. Perhaps a review of basic facts will help to lessen this impression.

### **What is infertility?**

A couple is considered to be infertile when they have not achieved a pregnancy after a year of unprotected intercourse. Women over 35 years should probably seek help after six months of trying, since a woman's ability to conceive begins to decline during her thirties.

There are two general types of infertility. Primary infertility means that no pregnancy has occurred. Secondary infertility implies that successful pregnancy has occurred in the past, or that there has been repeated pregnancy loss. At least 15% of all couples of childbearing age have difficulty achieving a pregnancy.

Numerous physical/medical conditions can affect a couple's ability to achieve and hold a pregnancy. Treatment can be for one or more diagnosable conditions.

### **The Causes of Infertility**

The causes of infertility are attributed to male factors (30%), female factors (30%), or a combination of male and female factors (30%). For approximately 10% of infertile couples, no known cause can be identified.

### **It Won't be Easy**

One of the most frustrating things to deal with is the long period of uncertainty during both diagnostic testing and treatment. Once you have finally decided to take action, you want answers. Unfortunately, many of the tests and treatments are tied to the body's hormonal cycles that cannot be speeded up. The menstrual cycle normally runs

28-35 days. Most tests must be done at specific times in the cycle to give meaningful results. Sperm require 72-90 days to develop. If the male is placed on medication to promote sperm production, almost three months will have to pass before results can be measured.

Another frustration is the number of decisions you will be asked to make. At times these decisions may seem overwhelming because you may feel you don't have enough information.

### Take Time to Think

It's important to give yourself time to think. Most decisions will not have to be made immediately. Go home. Begin writing down questions and concerns. Schedule a consultation with your physician to review your questions and concerns. If you want to, get a second opinion. Talk it over with your support group. Make an appointment with a counselor knowledgeable about infertility to sort out your emotions and options. Then decide.

Infertility is complex. Sometimes it may be due to a single medical condition, but it often results from a number of conditions requiring a series of treatments. Diagnosis, treatment, and the possible use of alternative options such as artificial insemination or in-vitro fertilization are constrained by many factors: biologic clocks of the menstrual cycle and semen production, personal finances, and one's emotional and physical limits.

Infertility treatment may take a long time. After months or years of trying to conceive on your own, you may still be looking ahead to months committed to treatment and/or trying alternatives. It won't be easy. You may even need to "take a vacation" from it. But through persistence you will eventually have an answer and will be able to make a positive decision for your future.

### You Are Not Alone

At this point there are no guarantees for successful pregnancy. But you are not alone. You have chosen to seek help in satisfactorily resolving your infertility, whether it be through a successful pregnancy or by choosing options such as adoption or child-free living.

*This brochure was adapted from materials prepared by Jody Earle and the Educational Materials Advisory Committee of the Ferre Institute, Derwent A. Suthers, editor. The Ferre Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to education about infertility.*

**Learn more about our programs by visiting the following sites:**

**[InfertilityEducation.org](http://InfertilityEducation.org)**

**[Ferre.org](http://Ferre.org)**

**[FerreGenetics.org](http://FerreGenetics.org)**

This material was prepared by **Ferre Institute, Inc.**, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the health of individuals and families by providing information and education on genetics, infertility, environmental exposures, and family health history.