



PATIENT FACT SHEET

Stress and Infertility

Stress can come from just about anything that you feel is threatening or harmful. A single event (or your worry about it) can produce stress. So can the little things that worry you all day long.

Acute stress, caused by a single event (or your fear of it), makes your heart beat faster and your blood pressure go up. You breathe harder, your hands get sweaty, and your skin feels cool and clammy. Chronic stress, which is when you are always stressed, can cause depression and changes in your sleep habits. It can also decrease your chances of fighting off common illnesses.

Stress makes many body organs work harder than normal and increases the production of some important chemicals in your body, including hormones.

Is stress causing my infertility?

Probably not. Even though infertility is very stressful, there isn't any proof that stress causes infertility. In an occasional woman, having too much stress can change her hormone levels and therefore cause the time when she releases an egg to become delayed or not take place at all.

Is infertility causing my stress?

Maybe. Many women who are being treated for infertility have as much stress as women who have cancer or heart disease. Infertile couples experience stress each month: first they hope that the woman is pregnant; and if she is not, the couple has to deal with their disappointment.

Why is infertility stressful?

Most couples are used to planning their lives. They may believe that if they work hard at something, they can achieve it. So when it's hard to get pregnant, they feel as if they don't have control of their bodies or of their goal of becoming parents. With infertility, no matter how hard you work, it may not be possible to have a baby.

Infertility tests and treatments can be physically, emotionally, and financially stressful. Infertility can cause a couple to grow apart, which increases stress levels. Couples may have many doctor appointments for infertility treatment, which can cause them to miss work or other activities.

What can I do to reduce my stress?

- Talk to your partner.
- Realize you're not alone. Talk to other people who have infertility, through individual or couple counseling, or support groups.
- Read books on infertility, which will show you that your feelings are normal and can help you deal with them.
- Learn stress reduction techniques such as meditation, yoga, or acupuncture.
- Avoid taking too much caffeine or other stimulants.
- Exercise regularly to release physical and emotional tension.
- Have a medical treatment plan with which both you and your partner are comfortable.
- Learn as much as you can about the cause of your infertility and the treatment options available.
- Find out as much as you can about your insurance coverage and make financial plans regarding your fertility treatments.

Who can help us?

RESOLVE is a national support organization for couples with infertility. For information on local chapters, you can reach them at 1310 Broadway, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144; (617) 623-0744. Also, support information and weekly internet chat sessions can be found through the American Fertility Association at www.afafamilymatters.com.