

Finding out how you truly feel about fertility treatment

IVF is something most of us imagine is for other people. Perhaps you expected that you would be able to conceive before you required fertility treatment, so you may find you feel quite alarmed when IVF is first mentioned as an option.

IVF is not for me

Some couples start out on their fertility journey certain that IVF is not for them. It may be that after trying other treatments without success, you don't want to pursue assisted conception. Fertility treatment is difficult and it can become overwhelming. There are those who would prefer a life without children, or would perhaps consider adoption, rather than letting their lives become dominated by fertility treatment. This is your decision to make, but you may get pressure from friends or family who don't know what it is like to go through treatment and who may think you should persist. Remember that this is your decision, and only you know how you will feel about it.

Although some people remain certain that they won't ever need IVF, others may find they change their minds once they realise it might be the only way they will have a child of their own. What can seem an awful prospect may become far more acceptable if it becomes a choice between IVF and not having a child.

I'm being offered IVF too soon

Even those who don't have any problem with IVF can feel it has been given as an option much sooner than they had anticipated. Even some doctors feel that IVF is sometimes offered to couples too quickly and this is partly because other methods may be time consuming and less successful.

I need time to think about IVF

It may take you some time to feel happy about going forward with IVF, so it is important to give yourself the time to think it through. You are making a big emotional and financial commitment, so you need to feel ready. Sometimes people find they become worried about things they hadn't even thought of before and if this happens to you, you may want to address these concerns and talk them through with your doctors or a counsellor.

Not everyone ever feels completely ready and prepared for IVF, but some people do find it easier to make the decision to go ahead than others.

IVF is messing with nature

People may have religious objections to assisted reproduction. For example, the Roman Catholic Church is opposed to IVF and some Muslims won't use donor eggs or sperm. A lot of the criticisms of fertility treatment focus on the idea of doctors 'playing God', but it is important to remember that IVF is creating the right circumstances for fertilisation. The real miracle of why some eggs fertilise and implant in the womb are still all down to nature.

It's a means to an end

Some people find they are surprisingly calm and relaxed about IVF. It's great if you can view it as a step towards what you want, but it may be hard to maintain that sense of calm rationality throughout the ups and downs of a treatment cycle.

The stigma of IVF

There can be a sense of shame associated with infertility and you may find you feel some stigma about needing help to have a child. The fact that infertility and IVF are so common doesn't make it easier for an individual to deal with these emotions or to overcome them.

Sometimes there can be a sense of denial about your infertility during the months or years of tests and treatment leading up to this point and it is only when confronted with IVF that you may have to accept that you are not going to conceive in the normal way. This may be the first time you have had to acknowledge the reality of your fertility problems and it is not always easy.

I need to know more about IVF

When you're told you should consider IVF you may suddenly realise how little you know about it. There are some people who like it this way. Then there are those who prefer not to know any more than they absolutely need to and who are happy to jump in feeling that the more they know the more they will worry.

However, many people do find that learning more about it gives them an understanding of what is going to happen and makes them feel more in control. This is a matter of personal choice and sometimes one partner wants to know all they can while the other may cope by knowing as little as possible about what is happening.

Joining a support network or an online group can be helpful as you will be able to find out about other people's personal experiences of treatment. Occasionally, people do report that reading too much of other people's experiences has made them worry more and expect the worst, so you may want to bear this in mind because you may not find IVF as tough as other people do.

Moving forwards

Once you've accepted that you are going to try IVF you may feel far more positive. After years of trying to become pregnant unsuccessfully there may be relief and excitement that at last you are finally doing something about it, that your situation is being taken seriously, and that you are going to put yourself in the hands of a team of experts who will be working with you to try to reach your goal.

What can be particularly difficult once you've decided to try IVF is dealing with your expectations. When you're investing so much time, effort and money into your treatment, you may feel that it should work. But remember that most people who have had their families through IVF didn't become pregnant the first time they tried it. When you look at the success rates for those who've continued with treatment the chances improve considerably. It is never going to be an easy process to go through, but if you know what to expect and if you are aware of what is going on at each stage of your treatment, it will help you feel more in control and the process will seem less daunting.