

EGG DONATION FACT SHEET

Introduction

Egg donation IVF is the type of fertility treatment offered to most women who have suffered a premature ovarian insufficiency (POI). It is often referred to as oocyte donation by medical professionals. So whether you suffer from Turner's syndrome, POI, have had surgery or chemotherapy, as long as you have a womb, egg donation is the treatment that your consultant or GP will probably suggest.

IVF (in vitro fertilisation) treatment with donated eggs means that the eggs are retrieved from the egg donor and then fertilised outside the body i.e. in a test tube (IVF) by the sperm of the recipient's partner. One or two of the resulting embryos (fertilised eggs) are transferred to the womb of the recipient approximately 2-5 days later. The HFEA quotes the average success rate of IVF with egg donation at 25-40% per cycle.

Who are the egg donors?

Egg donors are usually over the age of 18 and under the age of 35. They have proven fertility and are healthy. All donors are tested for hepatitis B and HIV, and they may also undergo other medical tests, depending on the policy of the clinic you choose. They also have no serious medical disability themselves or in their family. Donors have counselling to make sure they understand all the implications of donating their eggs.

Previously egg donors could only come forward for altruistic reasons and so the waiting lists for donor eggs were very long. The HFEA has now recommended that the amount a donor can receive to cover costs for travel, time off work, etc should be increased from £250 to £750. This and the availability of egg sharing programmes in some clinics has increased the number of donor eggs and so waiting lists are now minimal.

The physical characteristics of the anonymous donors are matched as closely as possible with those of the recipients. The clinic may ask you to advertise anonymously to recruit egg donors. Some clinics also offer an egg-sharing scheme whereby you share the eggs of a couple coming through the clinic for an IVF cycle, and pay for all or part of their treatment. The alternative is for someone known to you, such as a sister or a friend, to donate their eggs. Some couples choose to go abroad for treatment to countries where egg donors are more widely available. There are advantages and disadvantages to this and it is vital to choose a reputable clinic – clinics in the UK are subject to stringent controls and this may not be the case abroad.

What's the first step?

It is advisable to get a list of clinics (available from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority) to look at their experience in egg donation and their success rates and to send off for their information packs. Find a clinic that you feel happy with. Egg donation treatment is a stressful experience wherever you go; so don't add to the stress by choosing a clinic you feel uncomfortable with. The length of the waiting list will also vary from clinic to clinic. The cost per treatment cycle varies widely at £5000-8000, but it depends on which clinic you choose. And this may not include consultations, tests or drugs.

Choosing A Clinic

If you decide to try egg donation IVF treatment you will need to decide which clinic to go to. Waiting lists may vary between clinics. Many couples decide to become patients at several clinics in order to increase their chances of getting a donor and being treated. You should

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also expect to pay to go on a waiting list if you are using a private clinic, in some cases this is refundable against treatment. Remember that you are paying for your treatment - you are the customer - and have the right to make an informed decision based on full information.

The Daisy Network does not recommend any clinics, however below are some questions that you may wish to ask when deciding where to have your treatment:

- How long will I have to wait for treatment?
- Do the clinic specialists have any expertise or research interests in any particular area?
- What are the live birth rates for people with my condition and my age? (Ask for the latest year and the one before for a good comparison.)
- How many egg donation treatment cycles did the clinic carry out last year?
- How many embryos do they implant?
- What is the cancellation rate for treatment cycles?
- Are freezing facilities available for unused embryos?
- Is there a dedicated counsellor available at all times and will I have to pay for this?
- How much do treatments cost?
- What is the cost to go on the waiting list? Is this refundable against treatment?
- What other costs are likely to be involved? (e.g. drugs)
- Will the clinic accept results from investigations carried out elsewhere? (Your GP may agree to organise blood tests and semen analysis on the NHS)
- Will I have to buy drugs from the clinic? (You may be able to get them cheaper from your GP - it's always worth asking, or from private drug companies.)
- How will I be expected to pay and does the clinic have any payment plans to help spread the cost?
- Will I be able to see the same Doctor every time?
- Does the clinic actively recruit donors and how do they do this?
- Does the clinic offer egg share treatment?

Do the clinic offer known donor treatments?

NICE guidelines from April 2005 state women aged 24-39 (providing they meet the qualifying criteria) will be entitled to one free cycle on the NHS. However there is a so called 'postcode lottery' and the guidelines are not always met in every area. Funding is determined by your local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the criteria for funding vary between areas. Funding is less likely to be given in you are over 40, either you or your partner smoke or have children already.

What happens next?

All recipients and their partners have counselling before treatment and during it, if necessary.

If you have no natural cycle, you will be scanned at the start of the treatment cycle to make sure that the lining of the uterus is minimal. If you still have a cycle, you may be given a single injection or a drug inhale which you use continuously, to suppress it. Then you will take estrogen tablets/patches to build up your uterine lining. The development of your lining will be monitored by trans-vaginal ultrasound scans over the next 2 weeks. The lining should ideally be between 9 and 12 millimetres thick when transfer takes place. When the womb lining is ready the partner of the recipient produces a semen sample, which is then prepared and used to fertilise the eggs. You will be given progesterone pessaries or injections to take each day. If there are embryos to transfer, this will usually occur 2-5 days after egg fertilization.

Embryo transfer itself is not an uncomfortable procedure and takes no more than 10 minutes. The embryos are sucked into a narrow, tube-like catheter which is then inserted through the vagina into the entrance of the uterus. The embryos are then released and the instrument withdrawn. You may be asked to come with a full bladder as this makes it easier to insert the instrument. Some clinics like you to remain lying down for a while after the transfer. You will continue to take progesterone pessaries/injections and estrogen tablets/patches until the result of your transfer is known, usually 12 days later. If you are pregnant, you will continue to take both estrogen and progesterone for the first 3 months of pregnancy. If you are not pregnant, you should be advised by the clinic about your medication.

Member's Stories

One of our current Daisy Members has kindly offered the following information based on her personal experience this year, 2015.

Egg donors now receive £750 per cycle. This has significantly increased the number of donors and in most places there are now no waiting lists. I was offered a good match donor immediately after enrolling with my clinic, however I choose to wait 3 months and have got a fabulous match. As well as hair colour, skin tone, height and weight - I was asked to supply 3 attributes I wanted from a donor. I have found someone with all of these things, plus much more. Not all clinics offer this, but I would urge people to shop around. The NHS will often fund several clinics in one area, so people do have a choice. My doctor wasn't aware all clinics that were on the NHS referral list. I only found out by contacting the clinics directly to find out if they received NHS referrals. After researching three clinics in the north west, donor egg IVF costs £7-8,000. This includes all drugs. My first cycle is being paid for by the NHS.

As I have completely been through the menopause the process has been simple:

- Blood test and internal scan
- Oestrogen patches
- Second scan before treatment
- Progesterone pessaries
- The clinic are even happy to sedate me for the embryo transfer!

No injections or nasal sprays! It's really easy. This is something I have been concerned about for years and would have been much happier if I had known what a simple process it is. At the time of my diagnosis there was no info available on the web about this."

Another experience of egg donation

IVF with egg donation can be a very stressful and upsetting time. I was very lucky to have a supportive husband; we were there for each other during those dark moments when it all went wrong and also for the most exciting moments, when it finally went right.

We decided to have our treatment at St James Hospital in Leeds, mainly because the success rate was very good at that time and the cost not too extortionate. Unfortunately, as we lived in Cornwall then, the journeys for each appointment (and some of them were only ten minutes long) meant a five-hour drive. But that didn't deter us from reaching our goal.

Having the hormone injections was extremely painful though and my husband had to be brave to administer them every day, knowing the pain I was suffering. Still these things have to be endured to have the baby of your dreams. We were told that 14 eggs had been collected from the donor, so we had seven. (The other seven eggs went to another recipient.)

Out of our seven, four fertilised but only two continued to grow. The embryos are graded from 'A' (the best) down to 'C'; we had a 'B' and a 'C' which were transferred into my womb.

I remember the long drive back to Cornwall with our extra special cargo on board. I was thinking, 'At this moment I am pregnant.' After the agonising 14-day wait, I found that unfortunately it had not worked. I couldn't believe it. I was devastated. But you pick yourself up and carry on.

The next attempt (a year later) at St James produced more eggs and we had three transferred, one being a grade A. I'm sure that was the one that grew into our son, Joseph. We were extremely lucky to succeed after only two attempts. Many couples try time after time after time, which must be heartbreaking.

We have since tried again, in Bristol this time, but unsuccessfully. We now have four frozen embryos of poor grades which we hope to have transferred soon, but we have been told that the chance of them surviving the thaw is about 15%, so we are not holding our breath. The whole experience has been rewarding for us and I would do it all over again if necessary - there is a light at the end of that dark tunnel.

Sophie's Story

I found out that egg donation was my only chance of having a child when I was 15. I had suffered a premature menopause brought on by my ovaries failing. It didn't seem that big a deal at that age. I only started to think about it when I turned 18 and met my future husband.

He has always been very supportive and I couldn't have done any of this without him.

When I got married, aged 20, we decided to put our name on the waiting list for egg donors at St. Thomas Hospital. We were warned that it could be some wait. There is such a terrible shortage of egg donors because of what it entails, as well as the emotional issues. After six years of ringing the hospital every few months to see if there was any news (they must have been sick of me!), we finally got our chance.

A friend of mine agreed to become an egg donor on my behalf. Because at this time we still wanted it to be anonymous, her eggs were pooled so that we received eggs from someone we didn't know. By the time everyone had had all the tests and gone through the counselling programme, another nine months had passed.

I started taking my hormones and, after a month, everything was set. It was a very nerve-racking but exciting time. My donor produced 19 eggs of which 12 fertilised and I had 2 grade A eggs implanted. The other eggs were not suitable for freezing and went to research.

After a very long two-week wait, the moment of truth came, but it hadn't worked. At first I was inconsolable but then I pulled myself together and was determined to do it again. I just had to find another donor.

The hospital gave me a reference number and I started putting posters around anywhere I could think of. I put them in doctors' surgeries, shops and supermarkets and I even wrote to every chemists listed in the Yellow Pages asking them to put my appeal in their window!

There were a couple of enquiries but nothing came of any of them. I kept in close touch with the hospital for any news but unfortunately, because of the shortage of donors, they told me my only hope was to find my own donor.

A work friend who I don't see very often had heard about my problem and offered her services. I didn't want to get my hopes up. I wasn't sure at the time how I would get on knowing my egg donor.

She went through all the tests and counselling and started her treatment. It was actually a big help knowing my donor because we were able to help each other through if either of us felt down. Unfortunately she didn't respond well to the treatment and the first time it had to be cancelled.

She didn't give up and three months later we started again. This time she responded very well to the treatment but I didn't and my treatment had to be cancelled.

I was with her on the egg collection day and she produced 22 eggs. It was a very emotional time for both of us. 21 eggs fertilised and 18 survived freezing.

A month later, I started my treatment again for the fourth time. This time I didn't dare hope that it would work so I didn't get my hopes up. I had three frozen embryos replaced and started the long wait.

My donor was the first person we told that I was pregnant. She was overjoyed and I was amazed.

She was with us for our first scan when they told us we were expecting triplets!

I am now four months into the pregnancy and everything is going well. I keep in touch with my donor by phone every so often. I will never be able to thank her for what she gave me; she is almost as excited as we are. My husband has great respect for her.

We still have 14 frozen embryos in storage, and if we decide that we are not going to use them we would like them to go to other couples like us.

The treatment overall cost us about £6,500 but it has been worth every penny.

My life could now not be better, thanks to all the people who helped me. Never give up.

Sophie

If you wish to discuss egg donation, please contact one of The Daisy Networkers.

Any medical information in this fact sheet is for guidance only. The Daisy Network and its members have produced this fact sheet and we cannot guarantee its medical accuracy.

Further Information:

For a list of fertility clinics contact:

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Tel: 020 7291 8200. Fax: 020 7291 8201.

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Donor Conception Network www.dcnetwork.org