



# Fact Sheet

From ReproductiveFacts.org



The Patient Education Website of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine

## Stress and infertility

It is not clear how exactly stress impacts fertility. It is not known whether high levels of stress can prevent pregnancy or affect a woman's chance of conceiving. We do know that reducing stress provides a better quality of life during times of intense personal challenge.

### **What is stress?**

Stress is often defined as an event that a person sees/feels is threatening. In order to protect itself, the body responds with a "fight or flight" response.

How can stress impact a fertility patient?

Sometimes, infertility patients respond to the stress of being unable to conceive by aggressively pursuing treatment and procedures. Other patients withdraw and isolate from family, friends, and community. Neither of these extremes is ideal for patients who seek to treat their infertility and build a family.

### **How can I reduce my stress?**

Having less stress in your life while pursuing fertility treatment may not, in and of itself, result in a pregnancy. However, developing better coping strategies to manage stress related to an infertility diagnosis and treatment can help you feel more in control and improve your overall well-being.

It has been shown that stress does interfere with making rational and well-thought-out decisions. Reducing stress can allow patients to research, explore, and consider all the options available with a clearer mindset. By reducing stress, the pros and cons of one treatment course over another can be more effectively weighed and considered.

Reduced stress is good for your health. While no one expects patients to approach fertility treatment stress-free, finding ways to minimize stress while pursuing treatment can help. It is helpful for patients to look for ways to reduce the burden of infertility treatments and medical protocols.

There are many stress-reducing techniques; some of the more popular methods recommended to fertility patients are:

- Acupuncture
- Aerobic exercise (may be reduced during treatment)
- Collaboration with experts in stress reduction
- Guided imagery
- Journaling
- Listening to music
- Massage therapy
- Meditation
- Mind-body groups
- Mindfulness
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy
- Self-help books
- Support/educational groups
- Visualization
- Walking/hiking
- Yoga

### **How can I help my friend/loved one?**

Friends and loved ones are facing a challenge. Telling patients to be less stressed can make them feel more responsible for "causing" their own infertility and feel blamed. Telling someone to relax can cause greater stress. However, asking how couples/friends are doing and suggesting concrete and pragmatic ways to reduce stress will enhance quality of life and give the patient back some sense of control. For many struggling with infertility, just having friends/loved ones available for listening is greatly appreciated.

The goal of stress reduction is to minimize, not eliminate stress, by finding the technique that serves the patient's needs the best.

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