



TRANSITIONING FROM IVF TO A DONOR EGG CYCLE HOW YOUR TREATMENT PROTOCOL WILL CHANGE

Making the Decision. The decision to move on from In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) to a donor egg IVF cycle is a very personal one. You may see your funds running out, with no clear understanding of why IVF is not working for you. Some women in this situation may have gone through three cycles of IVF or more without success. Others may be experiencing recurrent miscarriages with no clear explanation as to the reason. So, at some point in your infertility treatment, you may find yourself at a crossroads.

Reasons for considering moving on to egg donation include:

- Advanced maternal age
- Genetic issues such as chromosomal abnormalities that might occur as a result of pregnancy
- Genetic diseases carried by the intended mother, such as Cystic Fibrosis
- Have undergone treatments for cancer, such as radiation or chemotherapy
- Have had ovaries surgically removed
- Produce little or no eggs despite the use of fertility medication
- Multiple IVF cycles did not result in a viable pregnancy
- Auto immune responses
- Primary ovarian insufficiency (premature ovarian failure)
- Unexplained infertility
- Unexplained recurrent miscarriage

How do you go about making this decision? As with most major life choices, it helps to have a plan. In order for you to consider a donor egg IVF cycle, the very first step will be having your doctor verify that you have a normal uterus and can carry a pregnancy.

You may be considering several options, some of which include:

- Continuing with regular IVF cycles utilizing your own eggs
- Donor egg IVF cycle
- Adoption
- Child free living

Now is the time for you to determine what aspects of becoming, and being, a parent are most important to you. As simplistic as it sounds, it may help to make a list of the pros and cons for each option that you are considering. This mental exercise can help to give you clarity when making a choice about your next steps.

Issues to consider may include:

- For some women, experiencing pregnancy is a tremendous incentive for pursuing a donor egg cycle and the desire to have this experience will go on the pro list. If you are part of a couple, donor egg allows the opportunity for the baby to have a genetic link to the intended father. For some, this will go on the pro list but for others, it might not.

- The issue of disclosure, to both the people in your life and also to your child or children about their origins will most likely be very significant to you. Some people decide to let the world in on their decision to have a donor egg IVF cycle. Others will opt to keep the details of their parenting journey private. Either choice is fine, and yours to make. It is very important to decide how you will handle the topic of disclosure to your child(ren) and also when and how you will start to have these conversations¹. If you opt to maintain secrecy, you should avoid disclosing the information to anyone who might inadvertently let it be known. It is in the best interests of your child that these conversations are steered by you, and no one else.
- Some men and women have concerns about bonding with a baby that is not genetically linked to the intended mother. This is a good time to ask yourself, what makes a family? What can I pass down to my child, if it is not my genetic heritage? Now is the time to think about the things that make you, uniquely you. Is it the color of your eyes? Is it your passion for sports, or for crocheting? Think about the things that currently bond your family together. Is it your shared experiences, your shared genetic traits or both things?
- It is also understandable that for many intended parents, a feeling of grief about giving up a genetic link to the mom will emerge². It is important that you acknowledge these feelings, which many people also report experiencing when they begin to consider adoption.

Different people will come up with different decisions about what they can and can't compromise on within themselves, and none of these choices are right or wrong. The important thing is that you be honest with both yourself and your partner. Many people seek out the services of a mental health professional such as a therapist at this time, in order to help navigate and understand the range of emotions they may be experiencing. Your physician or donor agency will be able to provide you with the contact information of professionals or support groups that can help.

First Steps and Next Steps. If you have made the decision to proceed with a donor egg IVF cycle, the protocols and routines that you are accustomed to following for your IVF procedures will change. The team of professionals committed to helping you achieve parenthood will expand to include an attorney or attorneys, and possibly an egg donor agency. You now have the option to continue working with your current IVF program, or you may opt to change physicians as well. It is up to you who will be on your team.

Once you decide where you wish to have your donor egg IVF cycle, you will need to schedule a consultative visit, similar to the one you had when you first decided to see a reproductive specialist. During this appointment, the intended parent(s) can ask questions about the donor egg database used by the IVF clinic and also egg donor agencies that the clinic works with. An important issue to be discussed at this time will be the intended mother's ability to carry a baby. Maternal age and other health related factors will be considered. This is the time to talk about the viability of elective single embryo transfer with your doctor, as well as your feelings about selective reduction, should a multiple gestation of high order multiples occur. In addition, financial costs including donor compensation should be discussed at this time. A list of the medical and psychological screenings required of the intended parent(s) and the donor will be outlined in detail for you as well. These will include, but may not be limited to:

Intended Dad

- Infectious disease screenings, including those for sexually transmitted infections
- Semen analysis
- Blood count
- Hemoglobin testing
- Psychological counseling session

Intended Mom

- Blood type
- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Blood count
- Infectious disease screenings, including those for sexually transmitted infections
- Mammogram
- Saline Sonogram
- Pap Smear

- Ultrasound
- Mock embryo transfer to determine if the uterine cavity is normal
- Psychological counseling session
- For those over 45 years of age, a clearance note from an M.D. will be required, as well as a cardiac stress test

Egg Donor

- Age (Ideally between 21 and 30)
- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Health History
- Pregnancy or Donation History
- FDA Risk Assessment Questionnaire
- Physical Exam
- Cultures & Ultrasound
- Blood Tests to determine hormone levels such as follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and Estradiol (E2)
- Blood Tests for Cystic Fibrosis, Fragile X Syndrome and other genetic conditions
- Infectious disease screenings, including those for sexually transmitted infections, and blood tests for Hepatitis
- Hemoglobin Panel
- Alcohol and Drug tests
- Non-Smoker
- Genetic Consultation
- Additional testing may be done depending on ancestry
- Psychological counseling session

The next step in the process is choosing your donor. You will have to decide on what type of egg donor you are most comfortable working with. There are two types of donors; anonymous, and known.

- Anonymous donors are those whose identities are not released to the intended parent(s), such as, their names, demographics, and date of birth. Sometimes current photographs are given to the recipient families, as well as baby or toddler pictures. Anonymous donors are typically obtained directly through the IVF clinic's egg donation team or an independent agency and are compensated a set fee for time and effort, as well as travel and/or expense reimbursement. Intended families are entitled to the donor's complete medical history, psychological and genetic screening results, and other information obtained through a questionnaire, such as personality traits, hobbies, goals and academic strengths and weaknesses. An anonymous donor is usually not informed as to the result of the donor egg IVF cycle and will not know whether a pregnancy took place. This option affords both the donor and the intended parents a cushion of privacy that many prefer³. In some instances, the donor will be given the opportunity to find out whether a birth occurred, in order to protect both parties from inadvertent consanguinity.

- Known donors fall into two categories:

1) Those that are related to or chosen by the intended parent(s), such as a sister or a good friend.

If you opt to work with a known donor that you currently have a relationship with, it is important for you to think about this choice very carefully and map out clear boundaries and expectations for the ongoing relationship with your baby, should a pregnancy take place. It is suggested that separate legal counsel be obtained by both the intended parent(s) and the donor and a legal contract be signed which outlines all details of the egg donation as well as future expectations.

2) A donor procured through an agency. Intended parent(s) who opt to work with a known donor or an anonymous donor through an agency have the option of going through donor profiles on line, which include current photos. Some people will feel a giddy excitement when they start to go through this process. For others, this may at first feel like an alien exercise, akin to utilizing a computer dating service rather than a donor agency. As you get comfortable with the process, you may feel yourself being drawn to certain donors. You might feel a connection with someone because of her interests or physical appearance. Many people find themselves simply going with their gut instincts in their choice of a donor, reporting that it simply felt right. When selecting a donor, pay close attention to

her profile. Read carefully, taking into account how she portrays herself. Look for a donor that you can relate to, that you could call your friend, or that you imagine could fit in with your own family⁴. Donors procured through an agency are given the option to be contacted in the future if a medical issue arises with the child(ren). Information about future arrangements, such as keeping the intended parents or agency apprised of the donor's address changes, or changes in her medical history, should be noted in the written contracts that your attorney will draw up for you.

Doctors, Lawyers, Indian Chiefs. Prior to beginning the medical process, you will be required to handle the legal arrangements needed for your egg donor IVF cycle. This is not as daunting as it sounds. An attorney will be recommended to you either through your IVF clinic or egg donor agency, or, you can choose an attorney on your own. It is very important to work with an attorney that specializes in this area of the law. Different states have varying laws governing egg donation, so it is important for you and your attorney to be knowledgeable about the law in your own state and what you need to do in order to establish your parenthood within that state.

- Your attorney will provide you with a written retainer agreement that should set forth his/her specific costs, expenses and legal services. You should feel free to ask your attorney any questions you have about the retainer agreement prior to signing it.
- Your attorney will then prepare an egg donation agreement and schedule a consultation with you to review the agreement and discuss legal issues surrounding egg donation. The purpose of the agreement is to state the parties' expectations before, during, and after the egg donation arrangement. The agreement should confirm that the intended parents and egg donor have met with a physician and mental professional and are informed of the medical procedures and the medical and mental health risks related to egg donation. It may also include provisions concerning: (1) any compensation or reimbursement expenses agreed to between the parties; (2) the placement of insurance for the donor to cover potential medical complications; (3) the parties' expectations with respect to confidentiality and potential future contact for a medical necessity or curiosity of the child conceived regarding non-medical issues; (4) the parties' assumption of risk; (5) any agreements with respect to the disposition of excess embryos; (6) notice provisions, and, if anonymous, whether a third party with both parties' identities will agree to act as an intermediary for the future exchange of information. The agreement should state that it is the intent of the parties that the intended parent(s) shall be the legal parents of the child(ren) immediately at the time of conception and that donor has no legal or other rights or obligations to the child(ren) even though she is genetically related to the child(ren).
- After you have reviewed your egg donation contract with your attorney and are comfortable with and understand the terms of the agreement, the agreement should be forwarded to the donor's attorney. Although it may not be required by the fertility clinic or agency that your egg donor have legal representation of her own, many attorneys will not agree to represent both parties and will require that the egg donor retain her own counsel. Hiring a separate attorney for the donor provides her with her own advocate and eliminates any concern that the donor did not have the opportunity to receive independent advice and representation concerning the egg donation arrangement. It is in the best interests of everyone involved in this process that the egg donation agreement is fully explained to the donor by an independent attorney prior to signing.
- Once the egg donation agreement is reviewed by each party with an attorney, and any changes have been negotiated and agreed to, your attorney should prepare a final egg donation agreement for each party to sign. If it is an anonymous arrangement there will typically be two sets of signature pages. One page will provide for the parties' anonymous signature (i.e., "Intended Mother X" and/or "Donor Z") and another page providing for the parties' actual signatures. The parties should only exchange anonymous signature pages and should retain their actual signature pages for their own records (and submit their actual signature to their attorney and the agency). Most fertility clinics will require that your attorney send notice that the egg donation agreement has been signed by both parties.
- At that point, you can proceed with your egg donor IVF cycle and the donor can begin taking any medications required.

Day to Day Life While Trying to Conceive in a New Way

- The intended mom and her donor will both begin taking birth control pills. This is in order to coordinate their menstrual cycles.
- Your health care provider will work with you and your donor on a schedule, which will include all of your appointments and also your medication protocols and cycle instructions. This should be mapped out in great detail.
- The intended mom should assume that she will have approximately three appointments at the clinic during this time, during which she will be given both blood tests and ultrasound tests. The egg donor will need to have at least six such visits. It is possible that the medication protocols priorly given will be adjusted, based on the results of these tests.
- Your health care provider will communicate with you as to next steps after each appointment.
- Your donor will be given instructions to take her “hCG trigger shot” 36 hours before the egg retrieval.
- At that time, the intended dad will be told when he should come in to provide a semen sample, which will be required on the date of the retrieval, except in cases where a sample has been cryopreserved previously.
- The intended mom will also receive additional medication instructions to coincide with the retrieval.
- When the retrieval procedure is completed, you should expect to be told of the number of eggs retrieved. The following day you should expect to be told the number of eggs that fertilized and the number of embryos.
- Three to five days after the retrieval, the embryo transfer will take place.
- You should assume that your egg donor IVF cycle will take approximately five weeks from the start date to the embryo transfer.
- Ten to twelve days after the embryo transfer a blood pregnancy test will be performed.
- In the event that the blood test is positive for pregnancy, you will be scheduled for a repeat blood test and an ultrasound two weeks later.
- Approximately two months after the ultrasound, if the pregnancy is progressing in a healthy and normal way, you will be given a referral to an obstetrician.
- You will continue to take the medications that have been prescribed for you, such as estrogen and progesterone, for two to three months post-transfer.

Preparing for Parenthood. If your egg donor IVF cycle resulted in a pregnancy, you may feel anxiety as well as joy, both about the pregnancy itself and also, about the parenting experience to come. This is a good time to connect with other people who are going through, or have already gone through the same things. Consider finding message boards and chat rooms that pertain to third party reproduction, and read articles of interest about pregnancy and parenting after infertility. If necessary, seek out the support of a mental health professional for added support. You have the right to enjoy this time in your life. In many ways this is the beginning, but you may find that the stress of your infertility experience is permeating your pregnancy. This is a very common response and if you need help, there is support out there for you to call upon. Somewhere around 3,000 babies⁵ are born via egg donor IVF cycles in the United States annually. Many of these babies are born to intended parents who network with each other and look for information and support from each other as well.

Several good resources for additional education and support are:

The American Fertility Association www.theafa.org
Parents via Egg Donation www.pved.org
Resolve www.resolve.org
Fertility Community www.FertilityCommunity.com
Fertile Thoughts www.FertileThoughts.com
FertilityForums www.fertilityforums.com

**Fertility Source Companies is a proud sponsor of The American Fertility Association's
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(877) 375-8888 www.fertilitysourcecompanies.com**

ENDNOTES

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