

SELECTING A SPERM BANK AND DONOR

published by Mikki Morrissette, author of

CHOOSING SINGLE MOTHERHOOD: THE THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE

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MEDICAL SCREENING

Be sure that donors are screened for the following:

- Sickle Cell Anemia
- Hepatitis B and C
- HIV (AIDS)
- HTLV I and II
- Herpes
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Chlamydia
- Mycoplasma
- Syphilis
- Tay-Sachs
- Thalassemia
- B-Strep
- Genital Warts
- Gonorrhea
- Multiple Sclerosis

If you are likely to be a carrier for some genetic disorders—for example, Tay-Sachs (Ashkenazei Jews), sickle-cell anemia (African American)—ask your fertility clinic to test you as well.

Verify that specimens are held 180 days and re-tested at that time for the HIV virus before being used.

American Society of Reproductive Medicine guidelines require that sperm banks use only frozen sperm.

Talk to your doctor about any risks involved in using frozen donor sperm, or in using reproductive technology techniques.

Deciding to become a parent (single or married) is a big step. Using donor conception to achieve that goal is another big step, requiring thought, research and preparation. Simply knowing what to ask and consider can be a difficult part of the process. So I consulted with respected counselor Joann Paley Galst, Ph.D., a psychologist in New York City who works with unmarried individuals, couples, and groups in approaching issues of infertility, pregnancy loss and reproductive health. These are the questions she recommends.

SAFETY QUESTIONS

1. Does the sperm bank have a strong track record with years of experience?
2. What accreditation/certification does the sperm bank have? (*the American Association of Tissue Banks requires the most stringent process*)
3. What genetic testing and drug screening is done on the donor?
4. Is the donor's blood type checked? (*women who are Rh negative will need a donor who is Rh negative, or will need to receive RhoGAM*)

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS OFTEN OVERLOOKED

In recent years, media reports, legal cases and support group discussions have brought to light issues that concern parents of donor-conceived children. Preconception counseling is not widely offered to discuss these questions with prospective parents who are simply eager to have a child. No independent governing body supervises the industry. So it is up to you to investigate and consider questions such as:

1. Are there restrictions on the number of times a sperm donor is allowed to donate? How many offspring are allowed per donor? How does the sperm bank keep track of the pregnancies per donor? How many offspring from your preferred donor have been born? How many are in your geographic area? (*it is estimated that only 40 percent of births are reported by parents*)
2. Some offspring share conditions with others from the same donor that were not indicated in medical history forms, or reported to families. How is donor information verified? If a donor is determined to have medical history or a genetic disorder not yet known at time of donation, how is that reported? Would you be notified? How has that been handled in the past? If your child has a genetic condition not connected to you in the future, will other families who used the same donor be notified?
3. Mistakes have been made. What precautions and steps are taken to be sure you receive the sperm you have requested?

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LOGISTICAL QUESTIONS

1. How is sperm shipped?
2. Can it be shipped directly to me for home insemination or must it be shipped to a physician?
3. Can extra sperm be stored for possible use later for another child? How long can it be stored?
4. How many vials are suggested?
5. What is the cost per vial of sperm?
6. What is the cost to store sperm?
7. If motility, morphology, or count of the sperm is inadequate after thawing, what is the bank's policy?

PERSONAL PREFERENCES

- What criteria are required of your donors? Are there education standards? Age limits?
- Does the sperm bank have a selection of donors of the racial, ethnic, religious, educational, etc. background you are looking for?
- Does the sperm bank work with parents in alternative lifestyles?

CLINIC QUESTIONS

- Is a cryopreservation tank available to store sperm for future cycles?

FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAKE

Think about what information you will want or need in a few years in order to answer your child's natural questions and curiosity about the donor. For example, children will often ask:

- What the donor is like;
- What he looks like (*will you receive a photo?*);
- Why you chose this particular donor;
- If they can meet the donor;
- What the donor's life is like now;
- What the donor's family is like;
- Are there any health issues the child/adult needs to be aware of?

If you are using an anonymous donor:

- What information is available about the donor and his parents to use in selecting a donor? What information about other relatives?
- Are records kept? For how long?
- Are medical records updated? How?
- Is non-identifying information available to my child upon reaching the age of maturity (e.g., age 18), or earlier with parental consent?
- How do you retain contact with the donor over time?

If you are using an open-identity donor:

- Is identifying information available to my child upon reaching the age of maturity (e.g., age 18), or earlier if needed for medical emergencies?
- How is the information kept? How do you retain contact over time?
- What if your facility closes? How will the child be able to access this information about the donor in the future?
- Do you facilitate the first contact with the donor? How?

Dr. Galst is co-director of support groups for the American Fertility Association and is a past chairperson of the Mental Health Professional Group of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine. She is available for brief phone consultations at (212) 759-2783.

Check SpermCenter.com for profiles of existing donors.

See also the "Questions to Ask Series" produced by RESOLVE: About Donor Sperm Insemination Programs and Sperm Banks (#8), by Diane Clapp, BSN, RN, Medical Information Director