

Keeping Your Relationship Strong During Infertility

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Introduction

- Infertility can threaten a person's emotional well being, dreams for the future and effect virtually all of their relationships with others
- Hallmark symptoms of infertility center around powerful roller coaster emotions, ranging from excitement and anticipation followed by disappointment and depression
- The degree of depression and anxiety that is often associated with infertility can equal that of a person coping with a life threatening illness, such as cancer or AIDS
- Compounding their stress, infertile couples don't share much of their pain with others
- Another source of stress includes facing innocent questions from their friends, family and co-workers regarding when the couple is *finally* going to start a family

Couples Issues

- Men and women approach infertility differently
- Men tend to want to "fix" the problem. This also reduces anxiety about seeing their wives in distress. They may also get lost in work or other activities.
- Women may experience "solution focused" approaches as not being heard or acknowledged.
- Women get some relief from talking about their stress and fears.
- The mechanical nature of sexual intercourse during infertility may also reduce intimacy.

Common Feelings Are:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|--|
| ▪ Depression | ▪ Anxiety | ▪ Sorrow over not leaving a biological child in the world when you die |
| ▪ Anger | ▪ Loss or Grief | |
| ▪ Helplessness | ▪ Feeling out of control | |

How Couples Can Help Each Other

- Remember that you are both on the "same side" of the problem. The problem is infertility, not you.
- Learn to *really listen* and not interrupt when your partner shares their experience of infertility.
- Allow your partner to deal with disappointment or stress in a way that is different from yours.
- Support your partner's strengths and self-esteem.
- Make a plan about how much information to disclose to family and friends.
- Create special time together with no faxes, beepers, etc. – and don't talk about infertility or other hot problem areas. Take time to heal and re-bond.
- Plan on how to cope with the holidays. Perhaps removing yourself from the "family holiday" scene may be a great alternative. Consider taking a romantic fall or winter vacation.
- Gain control with knowledge, professional support and a general game plan for Plan B.
- Know that your dreams have not been taken away – they have just not arrived yet.

Coping With the Ups and Downs of Infertility

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Individual Issues

- The emotional roller coaster
- Stress and depression
- Isolation
- Gathering medical information and weighing your options
- The challenge of surrender – acceptance that you are not in control

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How You Can Cope

- Learn stress reduction and guided visualization techniques
- Make a plan regarding how much information to disclose to family and friends
- Allow your partner to deal with disappointment or stress in a way that is different from yours.
- Support your partner's strengths and self-esteem.
- Plan on how to cope with the holidays. Perhaps removing yourself from the "family holiday" scene may be a great alternative. Consider taking a romantic fall or winter vacation.
- Self care and creating balance in your life.
- Gain control with knowledge, professional support and a general game plan for Plan B.
- Know that your dreams have not been taken away – they have just not arrived yet.