

Laura Berman

Many couples face infertility, but treatments help most

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BY [LAURA BERMAN](#)

With so many couples waiting until their 30s to start a family, baby-making woes are a fact of our modern world. One in seven couples experiences infertility, defined as the inability to conceive or sustain a pregnancy after one year of regular, unprotected intercourse.

The good news is that the latest and greatest in fertility treatments promise success to nearly 90 percent of the couples who try them. The bad news is that trudging through such treatments is a seemingly never-ending crescendo of money and stress that takes a toll on your relationship. Struggling with slower-than-expected conception can make sex about as sexy as doing the laundry. Suddenly, the world's most pleasurable pastime is riddled with scheduling, obligation and tension.

Infertility is an equal-opportunity offender: 40 percent of cases are the result of female factors, 40 percent male factors and 20 percent a combination of the two or unknown factors. Ovulation-stimulating drugs or surgery are often the first steps for women. Men make that not-so-fun trip to the doctor's office with a cup to get a check on sperm count.

When sperm count is low or otherwise impaired or a woman doesn't respond to initial treatment, couples often try intrauterine (a.k.a. artificial) insemination. A man's strongest sperm -- harvested via a process known as "washing" -- are injected into a woman's uterus at ovulation. Couples have a 2 percent to 20 percent chance of successful conception and generally go through three to six cycles.

In vitro fertilization is the best-known next step. Fertilized embryos, cultured in a laboratory, are implanted inside a woman's uterus. Chances of a successful pregnancy are around 30 percent for each cycle, which

costs an average of \$12,500. It's a more invasive procedure than other fertility treatments, since the eggs are often harvested from a woman's ovaries.

There are more than physical side effects to contend with when managing infertility. Performance anxiety, body-image issues, frustration and resentment are all common interpersonal repercussions. Every couple benefits from counseling while treating infertility. Therapy helps to ensure that your relationship -- and your sex life -- stay on track for when this highly anticipated baby arrives.

An important part of preserving your connection to each other during fertility treatment is enjoying non-baby sex, so your sex life doesn't become all work and no play. Your non-fertile time is an opportunity for sensual, spontaneous sex that will get you through the rigors of infertility medicine. Even if all you're doing is tracking your basal temperature, remind yourselves that sex is about pleasure and connection.

And long before turning to any infertility treatments, make sure you're up to speed on your own body -- not just technology. Since most people spend their whole lives trying not to get pregnant, many of us need some help in knowing when the time is right for procreation.

The OV-Watch from HealthWatchSystems alerts a woman to her six most conception-friendly days each cycle: the four days before ovulation, the day of ovulation and the day after. You wear the pale lavender wristwatch to bed at night, which alerts you to your fertile pre-ovulation days. It might not be the sexiest look I can think of, but it's kind of sporty and laboratory-chic, as far as fertility aides go.

When it comes to fertility, don't forget the old adage: time flies when you're having fun!

Laura Berman, Ph.D., is a couples therapist and director of Chicago's Berman Center. Questions? E-mail drberman@suntimes.com.