

assisted conception

when the road to parenthood isn't easy

THE
pink
elephants
SUPPORT NETWORK



assisted conception

SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED A LITTLE HELP

In Australia, 1 in 6 couples struggle with infertility - that is, they are unable to conceive within a 12- month period of actively trying. For some couples, it can be a much longer time frame, as they will have waited several years before seeking help, afraid to admit there may be a problem. Others may know prior to starting to try that they will need assistance. For example, one or both partners may have a pre-existing condition that affects their fertility. One thing is for sure, for the vast majority, the decision to undertake fertility treatment is not taken lightly, and with it comes a journey that is filled with physical and emotional strain.

Infertility can be a very lonely and truly heart wrenching experience. Most of us spend our childhoods dreaming about the day we will become a parent. So when this seemingly 'normal' part of life doesn't come easily, you begin to question everything - Why is this happening? Why me? Why is my body failing? Will I ever have a baby?

WHAT YOU MAY BE FEELING

Reactions differ between individuals and couples when they are told they'll need help to conceive. Try to remember that most of what you're feeling falls within the realms of normal and expected, and you'll likely find that you bounce between several emotions on any given day. Here are some of the more common reactions:

- Sadness
- Shock
- Guilt
- Relief
- Scared
- Angry
- Impatient
- Totally ok

assisted conception

CAUSES OF INFERTILITY / REASONS TO USE ASSISTED CONCEPTION

The causes of infertility are many and varied, and it is often wrongly assumed that if a couple is having trouble falling pregnant, that the cause must lie with the female. This is incorrect! Females account for approximately 40% of infertility in couples – as do males.

The most common causes of infertility are:

Female

Ovulation disorders

Blocked fallopian tubes

Endometriosis

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

Uterine fibroids

Advanced maternal age

Being overweight or underweight

Pelvic inflammatory disease

Premature ovarian failure

Immunological disorders

Male

Low sperm count

Azoospermia

Abnormal sperm morphology

Blocked vas deferens

Sperm DNA fragmentation

Anti-sperm antibodies



assisted conception

UNEXPLAINED INFERTILITY

In an ideal world, it would be helpful to know 'why' you are unable to become pregnant. Yet in approximately 20% of cases, couples who have been actively trying to become pregnant for 12 months or more, have not been able to do so and no reason has been found as to the cause. It can be extremely frustrating and disheartening because there is no 'reason' that can be 'treated', leaving you feeling powerless.

Many couples turn to IVF at this point as it can improve your chances of pregnancy by bypassing some of the steps in the conception process. In some cases, a fertilization issue may be discovered, in others, poor egg quality or inadequate embryo development will be found as a cause. Or, it may be an implantation issue whereby the woman's uterus is not receptive to the embryo. Couples may move onto Pre-implantation Genetic Screening (PGDS), so that their embryos can be tested for chromosomal anomalies and in some cases, this technique may provide the answer.

Sadly though, for some couples, after many failed cycles, still no reason will be found for their infertility and no baby will result from all that they've been through. In these cases, next steps need to be discussed, which may include donor eggs or sperm, surrogacy, fostering, adoption or even deciding to move on.

"Infertility is a highly emotional journey fraught with uncertainty and an ongoing rollercoaster of hope and disappointment."

assisted conception

SECONDARY INFERTILITY



You had your first child or children relatively easily, but when it comes to conceiving again, suddenly things don't seem to be working. As time goes by, people in your social circles or mother's group will have started having their second and even third babies, while you stand by, aching for the same. The comments will start from family and friends – or even complete strangers – 'When are you having another one?' 'You really should get a move on, you don't want a big gap between them,' 'He/she really should have a sibling'.

The grief associated with secondary infertility is often misunderstood or invalidated because you already have a child. You feel guilty about your sadness because you recognise that there are many women who have not been able to have even one child and 'at least' you have that. You may also feel guilty about not being able to provide a sibling for your child, leaving you feeling even more sad and isolated.

We understand that the ache in your heart and know the grief you're feeling is very real. Allow yourself the space to feel your sadness. Just remember to not be so entirely absorbed in your quest for another child that you lose precious moments with the child you have.

“ Never underestimate the power of wanting something so desperately, you will put yourself through hell to achieve it. ”

assisted conception



SELF-CARE DURING FERTILITY TREATMENT

While you may not always feel like it, taking time for self-care during treatment is vitally important for your emotional wellbeing. At a time when you are at the mercy of injections, scans and blood tests, each day fraught with anxiety, artificial hormones wreaking havoc with your body and your mood, it's the little things that you can do to nurture yourself that will help you make it through.

Here are a few ideas:

Acupuncture - while not for everyone, acupuncture has been proven to reduce stress, promote relaxation and stimulate blood flow to the uterus and ovaries

Have a relaxing bath - a soothing warm bath with some candles and soft music can be very calming

Go for a walk - some gentle exercise and being outdoors can give your body and mind an energy boost

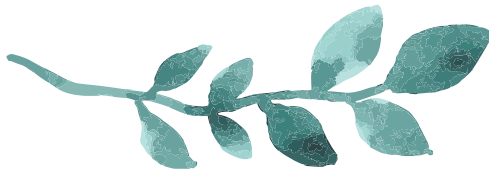
Sleep - crazy hormones and constant appointments can be tiring. Try to take any chance you can to get some extra rest

Say no - Try not to overextend yourself. You don't have to be all things to all people, so say no where you can - and don't feel guilty! This is a time where your own needs must come first

Meditate - a few minutes of stillness or meditation can do wonders to quieten your busy mind and help you relax

Eat well - while we certainly don't encourage you to deprive yourself of treats, healthy eating is best for your physical and emotional wellbeing

Immerse yourself - in something that you love to do, a hobby or craft, reading, baking, painting etc



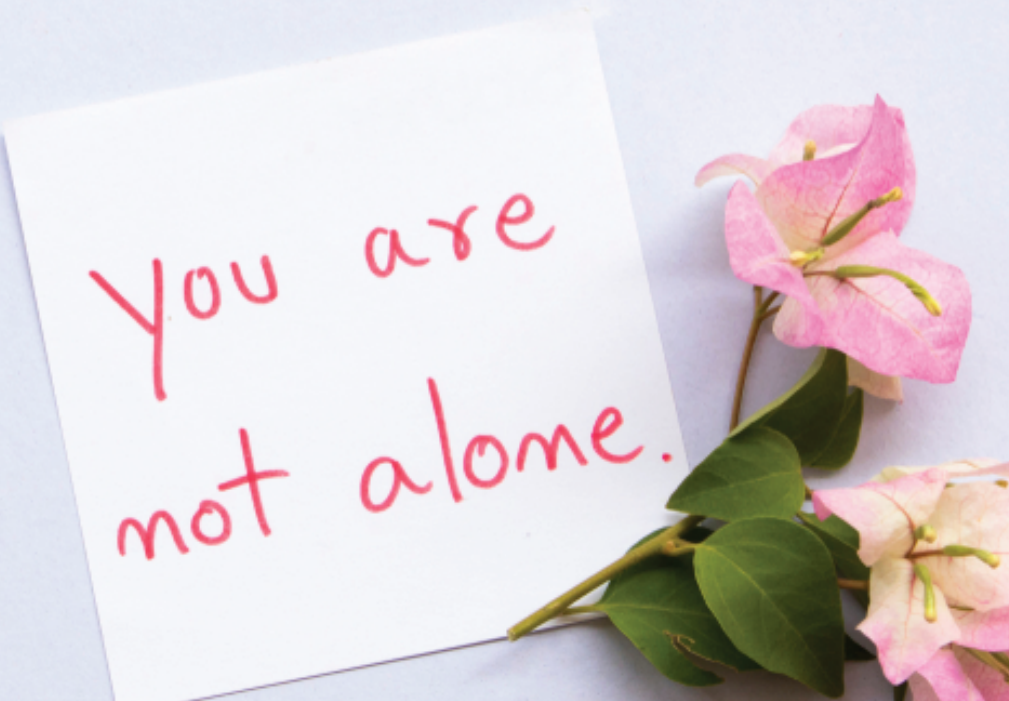
assisted conception

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL?

Whether or not to tell those around you that you are going through fertility treatment is a personal choice and you will know what feels right for you.

Often the more people you tell, the more people you need to update throughout the process which can be quite draining. On the other hand, if you have a couple of close friends or family members who you know will be supportive, then it can be good to have someone other than your partner to talk to, vent to or cry to. There are **online forums** where you can be connected with other women going through the same things as you. The online nature of these forums can provide a welcome anonymity for some, while still offering **much needed and often 24/7 support**.

Depending on your individual situation, it may be helpful to advise your workplace if you think they will be understanding, so you can ease the stress of trying to juggle treatment outside of work hours, particularly if you are doing multiple cycles.



you are
not alone.

assisted conception

THE THINGS PEOPLE SAY

If people know that you're having some trouble falling pregnant, or if it's taking a while for you to become pregnant, it's likely that you will come across people who try to offer you advice. For the most part, they are genuine in their desire to help, even if their suggestions appear trite or misguided. Sometimes though, you will hear comments that are not only insensitive but also hurtful. We suggest coming up with a couple of replies that you can use to stop the conversation in its tracks and help keep your emotions safe.

For example:

We'll be sure to let you know when and if we have some news to share.

We recently found out we're infertile and we're seeing a specialist. I'd rather not talk about it

*That's quite personal. Let's talk about something else.
How are you?*

Thanks for your suggestions. We're pretty confident we're doing all we can at the moment.

Everyone's situation is different and what works for one doesn't work for all.



assisted conception

MISCARRIAGE AND ASSISTED CONCEPTION

While IVF and other fertility treatments can certainly increase your chances of conceiving, unfortunately there is no guarantee against miscarriage. To endure a loss after the emotional, physical and financial strain of fertility treatment, is a heartbreak like no other. Of course, miscarriage is devastating no matter how it happens, but compounding the loss with the complexities of your conception journey – whether it be IVF, IUI, or donor treatment – makes it even more important to prioritise your mental and emotional wellbeing.

Often people around you won't even know you were pregnant, so it can be hard to talk about your loss and to ask for or receive support. Sharing your experience and talking about your loss can be very helpful and can assist you to process some of your emotions. We encourage you to talk to one of **Genea's specially trained fertility counsellors**, who are available to you at no extra cost when undergoing treatment.

There is no set time for grieving a lost pregnancy and the associated hopes and dreams you had for your much-wanted baby. It's common to have good days and bad, and this is part of the healing process. For some, planning another pregnancy straight away can be helpful, while for others, some time out from trying to conceive may be what is needed.

At **Pink Elephants** we can also support you through this devastating time through our miscarriage support resources available on our website, our **Facebook Miscarriage Support Group** and our **Peer Support Programme** where you can talk to someone who has experienced miscarriage and 'gets it'.



Find more resources online at pinklephants.org.au

assisted conception

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

If you're partnered, the desire to conceive over a long period of time and then undergoing fertility treatment can put enormous strain on even the strongest of relationships. It's important not to shut each other out during this time and remember that you are both ultimately hoping for the same outcome.

Here are some ideas for maintaining a connection with your partner:

Keep communicating - As with every part of a relationship, communication is key to getting through the tough times, and this is even more important when experiencing the stress of infertility. It is fairly normal that women will want to talk about the situation often, whereas men tend to internalise their thoughts and feelings. Remember everyone handles stressors differently, so try to be patient with each other.

Schedule date nights - It's important to schedule some one-on-one time with each other, preferably out of the house, where you can get out of your normal routine and catch up. Even better if you can make these date nights free from fertility talk.

Remember intimacy - When you've been trying to conceive for a long time, sex and intimacy starts to become very much about baby making and ovulation. Add into the mix hormone injections and side-effects, and our desire for intimacy can fly out the window. However, it's important to make time for nurturing each other physically, that doesn't have to do with conception. It doesn't have to mean sex. Massages, bubble baths or cuddles can also be connecting.

Keep on living - It can be very easy for your whole life to revolve around trying to conceive, and when undergoing fertility treatment, it can become even more so. Putting everything on hold 'just in case' you become pregnant only serves to stop you from continuing to have enjoyable experiences together as a couple. And let's face it, once a child comes along, everything will change!

See a counsellor - If you are finding it difficult to keep the lines of communication open, or if one or both of you feels a few sessions with a counsellor would be beneficial, this can be a great way to express yourselves in a safe space.