

Infertility options

Having a baby is a happy occasion that many couples look forward to. However, some couples need help to conceive. About 10% of Americans of reproductive age have problems with infertility.

A study in the November 17, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports that 3 factors — the age of the woman, number of embryos transferred, and the ability of the infertility laboratory to identify and select high-quality embryos for transfer — had a strong effect on the success of

an **in vitro fertilization** (IVF; see definition on this page) and the risk for **multiple birth** (giving birth to more than one child).

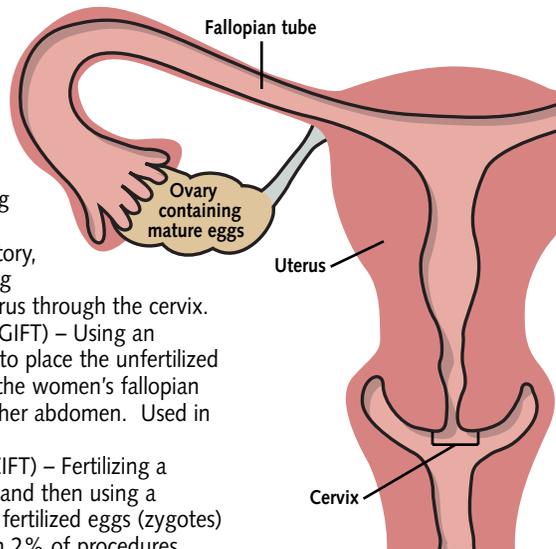
Assisted reproductive technology (ART) is a term used for all treatments or procedures that involve manipulation of human eggs and sperm for the purpose of establishing a pregnancy. Couples interested in ART should consult their doctor to discuss all the factors that may affect the rate of success in their particular case.

CAUSES OF INFERTILITY:

- The woman's fallopian tubes may be blocked or damaged, making it difficult for the egg to be fertilized or for an embryo to travel to the uterus.
- The male sperm count may be low or there may be problems with sperm function.
- The woman's ovaries may not be maturing and passing eggs normally or egg quality and number may have diminished with age; or the woman may have hormonal conditions that adversely affect ovulation.
- Disorders of the uterus or vagina that impair fertility.

ADVANCED TYPES OF FERTILITY TREATMENT:

- **Superovulation and intrauterine insemination (SO-IUI)** – Using hormones to stimulate multiple egg ovulation and placing sperm in the uterus at the time of ovulation.
- **In vitro fertilization (IVF)** – Using hormones to stimulate egg ovulation, extracting the eggs, fertilizing the eggs in the laboratory, and then transferring the resulting embryo(s) into the woman's uterus through the cervix.
- **Gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT)** – Using an instrument called a laparoscope to place the unfertilized eggs and sperm (gametes) into the women's fallopian tubes through small incisions in her abdomen. Used in 5% of procedures.
- **Zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT)** – Fertilizing a woman's eggs in the laboratory and then using a laparoscope to help transfer the fertilized eggs (zygotes) into her fallopian tubes. Used in 2% of procedures.



WHAT IS INFERTILITY?

Infertility is a condition of the reproductive system that impairs the ability to conceive children. A variety of complicated factors determine whether a couple can successfully conceive. Approximately a third of infertility cases can be attributed to factors that affect the man, a third to factors that affect the woman, and the remaining third to a combination of problems with both partners or an unexplained source.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP:

Generally, couples who have been unsuccessful in conceiving for a year are advised to seek medical help. The doctor will conduct a thorough medical history and physical examination to determine general health and pinpoint any possible causes of infertility.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Send business-size self-addressed stamped envelop to:
ACOG Resource Center
Infertility: Causes and Treatments (#AP002)
P.O. Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6920
or www.acog.org
- RESOLVE, The National Infertility Association
National Helpline
617/623-0744
(for infertility information, support groups, and referrals) or
www.resolve.org
- American Society for Reproductive Medicine
205/978-5000 or www.asrm.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.

Additional Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Reproductive Health Information Source, American Society for Reproductive Medicine

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