

What Is Ovarian Reserve Testing— and Should You Have It Done?

It sounds much scarier than it is.

By Krissy Brady | *May 9, 2016*



These days, many of us decide to start our brood of mini-mes later in life so we can rock the career scene. But with that decision can come a wave of uncertainty in the form of ticking ovaries. The number of viable eggs a woman has starts to decline in her early thirties (and more rapidly in her mid-thirties and forties), as we're sure you've heard. For 33-year-old Donna, a Texas-based administrative assistant, that weighed on her mind.

"I was lucky enough to meet my now-hubby in my late twenties, but neither of us wanted to start a family right away," she says. "In fact, we still don't." Even though she knew holding off was the right thing to do, she didn't want to leave her odds of conceiving to chance. Luckily, a simple blood test could tell her once and for all if she and her ovaries were on the same page.

Ovarian reserve testing is a fairly new blood test that allows women to check on the status of their fertility. Since it gives insight into how many eggs a woman has, it can help her determine how she wants to proceed when it comes to baby-making. "Some women have a higher number of eggs than others, so ovarian reserve testing is a way to

assess whether a woman's egg numbers are high, average, or low for her age," says **Wendy Chang, M.D.**, scientific director of the **Southern California Reproductive Center**.

The primary blood test used is the Anti-Mullerian Hormone (AMH) test. "AMH is secreted by the cells that surround healthy eggs that have the potential to ovulate," says Chang. Basically, the higher the number of eggs, the higher the AMH level. "We use AMH as the best indicator," she says. The test is super-convenient and relatively inexpensive, coming in at around \$100. "It gives women a much more accurate assessment of where she compares to other women her age, and helps her decide how aggressively she needs to proceed," says Chang.

However, ovarian reserve testing does have a downside, says Louis Weckstein, M.D., IVF and medical director at the Reproductive Science Center in California. For example, if a woman receives word that she has a low egg count, but hasn't been trying to conceive, there's still a chance she'll have no trouble getting pregnant naturally, and the test results will freak her out unnecessarily. On the flipside, if she's a youngin' (think: under 35) who just wants a general idea of her odds, the test can give her reassurance or tell her it might be time to start trying.

Still, it can't tell you exactly how many eggs you have left—or the quality of those eggs. "A woman's age is often a better predictor of egg quality than ovarian reserve testing," says Weckstein. But for women who are trying to get pregnant and are striking out, the test results can be useful to predict how they'll respond to fertility medications, like Clomid or Serophene, two common ones. "This can aid the doctor in determining the correct dosage of medication for treatment, particularly in an IVF treatment setting," he says.

For Donna, the results of her blood test showed that she had way fewer eggs in her basket than she'd hoped. "It turned out I had a low ovarian reserve," she says. "I left the appointment with a fistful of brochures and basically spent the next hour sobbing in my car." Even though the news was upsetting at first, she was relieved to know where she (and her womb) stood.

While ovarian reserve testing only uncovers a piece of your fertility puzzle, the information it provides could be the make-or-break moment you need. Ultimately, Donna decided to freeze her eggs—an option she may not have had if she didn't get the test done. "It put me back in the driver's seat, and I couldn't be more grateful," she says.

<http://www.womenshealthmag.com/mom/ovarian-reserve-testing>