

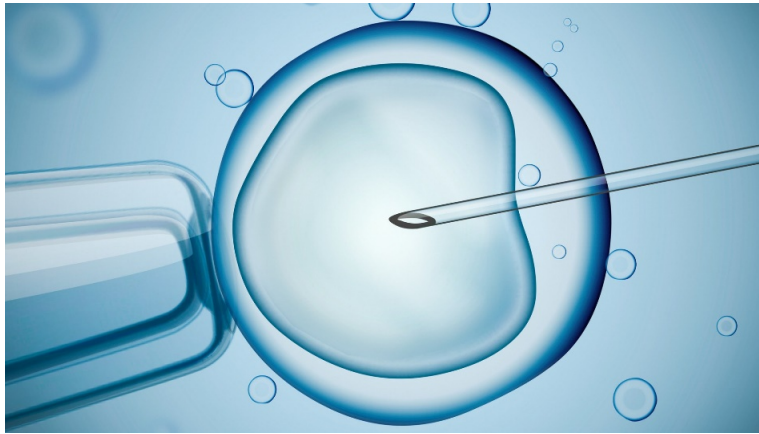
Health

9 Things to Know If You're Thinking About IVF

Experts separate the myths from the facts about how IVF affects women's bodies and their babies.

By Jessica Migala

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For many people who struggle with infertility, in vitro fertilization can be a source of great hope. But if you're considering IVF—in which doctors retrieve your eggs, fertilize them in the lab, and implant the resulting embryo(s) in your uterus—you've probably come across at least one of the many misconceptions surrounding the treatment (some of them downright scary). Here, we identify what's fact and what's fiction when it comes to the health implications of IVF for women and their little ones.

Myth: IVF raises your risk of breast cancer

In an IVF cycle, medications are used to stimulate a woman's ovaries to develop multiple mature eggs. Because those meds cause changes in estrogen and progesterone levels—and both hormones are linked to breast cancer—women who undergo the treatment have long worried it might increase their odds of developing the disease. Finally, a large, high-quality study has found reassuring evidence against the theory. Published in *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association* last month, the study followed 25,108 women in the Netherlands who underwent fertility treatments (the majority had IVF) between 1980 and 1995. Women who

received IVF were no more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer than women in the general population.

Myth: It's linked to ovarian cancer

For the same reason IVF was thought to cause breast cancer, there was concern that it put a woman at risk for ovarian cancer as well. But the authors of a 2013 meta-analysis of studies involving more than 180,000 women and published in the *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* concluded that there was “no convincing evidence of an increase in the risk of invasive ovarian tumors with fertility drug treatment.”

Myth: IVF Babies may be delayed or have birth defects

"There is no truth" to this fear, **Mark Surrey, MD**, medical director and co-founder of the **Southern California Reproductive Center**, told *Health* in an email. What's more, IVF embryos are often genetically tested prior to implantation, he points out.

Babies conceived this way may actually have a leg up, says Dr. Surrey's colleague, **Shahin Ghadir, MD**: "Studies have shown that children born to IVF, due to the fact that their parents are well-educated and informed and possibly of higher socioeconomic status...have higher IQs and are developmentally advanced."

Fact: IVF patients may have more complicated pregnancies

It's true that a doctor might want to monitor an IVF patient more closely for obstetrical complications like gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, and preterm delivery, says Meike Uhler, MD, an ob-gyn and reproductive endocrinologist at the Fertility Centers of Illinois. But if so, it's not necessarily because the woman had IVF, she explains, but rather because the underlying cause of infertility may affect pregnancy as well.

Fact: IVF makes you more prone to blood clots

Any pregnancy makes you more prone to blood clots. "Any woman with elevated estrogen levels, whether caused by a natural pregnancy or IVF stimulation medication, would be at a minimally higher risk of blood clotting issues," explains Dr. Ghadir. "Generally speaking, IVF is very safe with minimal risks and no long-term side effects," assures Dr. Ghadir.

Fact: Insurance companies sometimes cover IVF

According to RESOLVE: the National Infertility Association, 15 states require insurers to cover at least some forms of infertility treatment; and several of them mandate coverage for IVF as well. (You can look up those states at Resolve.org.) Your company may also provide coverage as

part of a wellness package for employees. It's always worth asking both your company and insurer about their benefits.

Myth: You'll have to use IVF next time, too

Just because you needed IVF to have one baby doesn't mean you'll need it again in the future. For example, if a woman with unexplained infertility (which means a medical reason could not be determined) was able to have a child with IVF, the next time around she might be successful conceiving the old fashioned way, says Dr. Surrey.

Myth: You'll probably have multiples

Couples sometimes opt to transfer more than one embryo in the IVF process, to increase the odds of success. But it's not the only option: Some labs will do additional testing of the embryo to ensure greater success with a single-embryo transfer, explains Dr. Surrey.

Myth: IVF is a last resort

In some cases, you may want to try IVF sooner rather than later, says Dr. Uhler. "It's very important to do a careful evaluation for the reason [behind the infertility] and then the doctors can direct you to the best treatment," she explains. For example, "if a woman is 40, she may want to go straight to the treatment with the biggest success rate: IVF."

<http://www.health.com/pregnancy/ivf-health-risks>