

Coping with Anxiety and Depression During IVF

By the time you have made the decision to start IVF treatment, you've already been through an emotional and distressing time. However, your decision to begin IVF will also be met with a range of emotions. Couples going through IVF treatment usually find it challenging, both physically and emotionally. Two experiences that are commonly reported (often together) are anxiety and depression. Anxiety and depression both stem from normal and adaptive responses. However, they become unhelpful when they interfere with your everyday life. Everyone has his or her own way of coping with difficult times. However, a number of coping strategies have been found to be particularly helpful to people experiencing anxiety and depression.

Difficult Times

The process of IVF is difficult, and you may experience anxiety and/or depression at any of the stages. However, some phases of treatment have been reported to be more difficult than others. Therefore, it is important that you take particularly good care of yourself during these times. Reportedly difficult stages include: making the decision to start treatment, which can be a time of uncertainty. Another potentially difficult time is egg retrieval, and then waiting to find out how many embryos formed. Waiting for the pregnancy test after embryo transfer has been reported as the most difficult stage of treatment. This is because all you can do is wait and hope. One of the final stressors is receiving the pregnancy result, which can be stressful whether it is positive, negative, or unknown.

Coping Strategies

Everyone copes with anxiety and depression in their own way. Therefore it is important for you to call on techniques that you have found most beneficial in the past. Furthermore, a number of coping strategies are commonly found to be helpful, such as relaxation, communication, information gathering, social support, distraction, exercise, enjoyable activities, and professional support, some of these have been outlined below.

Relaxation

A wide range of relaxation techniques have been found to be effective, one of which is controlled breathing. This can be used in situations where you start feeling anxious, as it helps with both psychological and physical symptoms.

1. Inhale normally (not too deep)
2. Hold that breath for 5 seconds
3. Exhale slowly
4. Repeat

Communication

Talking with your partner is crucial throughout the IVF process. You may cope differently, so it is important to communicate about your individual experiences. You should also explain your feelings and listen to each other. This way you can go through the experience together, even if you deal with it in different ways. You may find that you also express your feelings differently, this is fine. The main importance is that you understand how you both express your feelings. Just because you do it differently doesn't necessarily mean one way is better than the other.

Information Gathering

There may be times during IVF when you are faced with uncertainty, which can cause anxiety. A good way of coping is to find out as much information as you can, hence reducing the uncertainty. There are many opportunities to gain information, during meetings with your doctor, nurse, and counsellor. Therefore ask as many questions as you like. If you find this beneficial you may also want to do some further research through the internet and books. Information sessions are also available, and found by most to be extremely beneficial.

Fun

One of the major symptoms of depression is a lack of pleasure in life. Therefore a good coping mechanism is to include an enjoyable activity for you to do as a couple every week. This can work as a distraction, but also

provide you with something positive to look forward to as a couple. This could be anything from a trip to the movies, a nice dinner, or a weekend away.

IVF treatment has been described as a roller-coaster ride. This is because you will go through some really exciting times, but then also some hard times. Therefore it is common to experience anxiety and depression throughout the process. A number of coping strategies have been outlined in this article. However, there is no right or wrong way to cope. Therefore it is important to do what is best for you, and keep communicating as a couple. Furthermore, if you feel that you need some further assistance, counsellors are available at Wesley Monash IVF.