

PREP LIKE A PRO

Advances in reproductive science continue to improve success rates since IVF became available in the late 1970's but the ins and outs of IVF are still not common knowledge. IVF treatment requires as much of your mind as it does your body. It brings ups, downs and everything in between for you to process before, during and after the cycle is complete. Every IVF experience will be personal and unique, just as your fertility story is,

Here are ways to help you mentally and physically prepare for IVF like a pro:

Get the facts - One of the best methods to combat anxiety is with knowledge. Some clinics have better success rates than others and it's down to how much care they take throughout the whole process, from start to finish. Every step counts: from preparation to protocols, to of course egg collection, transfer and embryology. A detailed conversation about your diagnosis, how the treatment process works and what your responsibilities are will provide clarity and confidence as you move through your IVF journey. It is your right to ask. Talk with your fertility team to ensure all of your questions are answered: are you aware of what is going to happen during each phase? did your consultant discuss possible side effects and complications that could occur? Ensure you are comfortable proceeding and proper expectations are set. You are investing time, money, energy, your body and your dreams into this - you deserve to understand and be your own best fertility advocate.

Preparation on every level - Prepare yourself for the demands of IVF and identify strategies to manage the process can help on every level - mentally, physically and emotionally. IVF is a stressful process. Being disorganised will compound that stress. When emotions run amok and random thoughts enter your mind at any given time, you can promote calm by keeping yourself organised.

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An IVF journal is a great way to have a go-to-place for all things IVF. Use it to jot down questions, ponder emotions, medications, record your cycle results, appointments and anything you want to remember along the way.

Optimise egg and sperm health - At a time when so much feels out of your control, it's crucial to control the things you can before starting IVF. The best chance for a successful outcome starts with choices that support your health, While you can't change your age or genetics, you can nourish your mind, body and reproductive wellness from within. It takes approximately 4 months for an egg to mature within its ovarian follicle. So, your nutritional and lifestyle choices will improve the quality of your eggs, but it takes time. Men manufacture sperm all the time, which means sperm production constantly draws from their nutritional intake and lifestyle choices. Eating healthily is one of the best fertility boosters.

When we talk about **lifestyle** we don't just mean the areas of your life that are commonly associated with poor lifestyle such as smoking, drinking, lack of exercise....lifestyle is about your whole life including relationships, stress levels, work-life balance, thoughts and emotions as well as your physical well-being. Remember that changing your lifestyle doesn't have to be a great upheaval, small changes can pay dividends.

Sleep is essential for good general health and many body processes. This means it is essential for optimal reproductive health as well. Healthy sleep habits require adequate duration (7-9 hours). Allow your bedroom to be a sanctuary ! Limit electronics for one hour at least before bed.

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Check your Vitamin D levels - Vitamin D deficiency is on the rise. More than 50% of the population have a severe deficiency and it could be as high as 94% of the South Asian population. This is because the primary source of this hormone (yes, it's a hormone not a vitamin) is sunlight. Vitamin D is fast emerging as one of the most important vitamins of all for fertility. Studies suggest, for example, that it is present in follicular fluid that nourishes the developing eggs in the ovaries and that low levels of Vitamin D show an increased likelihood of implantation issues.

Have regular acupuncture sessions - Acupuncture is a system of balancing 'qi' - the subtle form of energy that Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers flows through channels, called meridians, in our bodies. Acupuncture reduces stress levels, helps improve blood flow to the uterus, improves egg quality, thickens the uterine lining and improves the uterine environment in preparation for implantation. If at all possible, I recommend beginning acupuncture treatment around three to four months before starting the IVF process and I encourage all of my clients to have weekly sessions during IVF treatment and in particular during the TWW and into pregnancy. Acupuncture can improve IVF outcomes by a massive 60% as it's one of the only treatments that can make a direct impact on your fertility and improve stress management.

Ensure that you find a fertility trained acupuncturist who has the knowledge, expertise and clinical experience to support you on this journey.

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Master your medication. It would be a red flag if anyone was excited for this part of IVF. No one enjoys the injections but you will be amazed at what you're capable of doing.

Review all of your medications in detail before you start injections and make sure you have everything you need. Ask your fertility team questions so you understand what each medication is for and how to mix and administer with confidence.

Giving yourself an injection can be scary the first time....remember that it only gets easier after the first injection is done ! The main thing you can do is give yourself time and space to get it right.

Say 1,2,3 and just do it!

Manage your stress levels - Additional stress with IVF is normal. Everyone experiences it differently based on their own personality and history. But it is important to know that too much stress can throw your hormones awry. When you're under stress, the fight or flight response kicks in by producing more Cortisol (the stress hormone), which can throw off your reproductive hormone production. Avoid unnecessary stress during your IVF cycle by making your life as simple as possible. Major upheavals like moving home or changing careers bring more stress and are better avoided during this time if possible.

We live in a 24/7 world with emails, messages and phone calls in the palm of our hands. The boundaries between home and work are increasingly blurred, but a few jobs are so vital that they can't be put down for an evening or weekend. Learn to 'close the door' to your office both physically and metaphorically: switch off your email alerts when you finish working for the day, even better, turn off your phone and close your laptop.

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Don't leave your partner behind. Infertility and IVF can be one of the most challenging experiences a couple goes through in their life. It is completely normal for each partner to react differently to fertility and IVF stress.

Make communication a priority. Your partner needs support just as much as they need to be there to support you. Provide the opportunity to discuss your feelings, concerns and excitement as you move through your cycle. Talk about your hopes and expectations for each other and how better to support one another. No one should feel alone, especially when you're in it together.

A quick note about IVF and sex: unless prohibited by your fertility clinic, try to work in some 'just for fun' sex instead of the 'let's make a baby' sex that has likely taken over this part of your relationship.

It's okay to say NO - certain occasions bring simultaneous joy and pain when trying to conceive (like baby showers, gender reveal and birthday parties). Protect yourself, emotions and mental health during IVF by putting yourself first. If you aren't up to it, it's okay to just say no. But remember, like you, we never know what someone is dealing with behind public view, so be compassionate in your response.

Choose your people. Be proactive about creating your IVF support system. Knowing who you want to share this part of your life with when you're in the thick of it and when you need someone to lift you up or just listen, is priceless.

This is your private information to share and it can take time to decide the right people you want to let in. In hindsight, sometimes patients wish they had not told so many people initially as it adds more pressure. Family and friends can offer amazing support or they end up being an emotional drain.... you decide what works for you.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

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Breathe. Enough said..... you've got this !!

You are strong. You can absolutely do this. And you don't have to do it alone ! Look for the positive and celebrate each milestone as you move through treatment. No matter how big or small, each one is vital to reach your goal of bringing home a healthy baby.

Focusing on these areas in advance will help you have a better IVF experience overall. This is an exciting, magical and momentous time for you. Remember to be kind and patient with yourself along the way.

Finally.....IVF is nothing short of miraculous but the physical, mental and emotional implications of IVF are immense. With that in mind why would you not work with a fertility trained acupuncturist who will take a holistic view of your fertility health and ensure that you are optimising your chances of a successful IVF cycle.

IVF has only a 30% success rate so maximise your chances of this round working for you and get in touch.

If you'd like to work with me either in clinic or virtually using my IVF preparation program then please drop me a DM.

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