

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY DURING INFERTILITY

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Becoming adults and having children is part of the natural order of things. Although there are those who know early on that they have no interest in raising a family, the vast majority expect to create the next generation. Whether the fear that you will be blocked along this path sneaks up on you gradually or whether the boom is dropped on your head like a ton of bricks, there is no way that shock waves do not reverberate through your entire being. Suddenly, the space which you were consciously or unconsciously holding for your prospective family is as empty as a vacuum. And like a vacuum, it has a force – a force that sucks the existential ennui that lies dormant in the human condition from its hiding place and, on an energetic level, breaks your heart. And aftershocks magnify uncertainty with the vibration of anxiety, riling up what had been homeostasis.

Depression and anxiety during the infertility experience is normal. It is normal as a response to the diagnosis and it is normal as part of the roller coaster of hope and despair of treatment. It can be more of a burden if depression or anxiety had been your companions in the past.

As I have watched and supported infertility patients, I have been struck by another aspect of the human condition: the strength of the human spirit to override the inclination to be pulled down with sadness and worry. The human spirit is impressive. It can be seen when we are called upon to handle traumas of every variety and infertility is no exception. And the strength of the human spirit can be counted upon to be recruited the way Popeye recruits spinach, *even if depression and anxiety had been your companions at some point in your history*. It's a bit paradoxical, but it is possible to recruit the strength that you need even when you feel at your weakest.

This does not by any stretch of the imagination mean that I am recommending that your feelings be denied. What I am suggesting is that your capacity to cope can be to you what spinach is to Popeye. Depression can be overridden by the need to be mobilized for the treatment. Information and going into action are well-recognized as anxiety-reducers, therefore by educating yourself as to your options and following through, you have a really good shot at navigating your way through the challenge course. And if you feel that you are not overriding

the emotional impact of infertility that does not make you a failure. All it means is that you would need to take strength from feeling supported along the way.

No one reading this need be told that infertility treatment is as demanding as a full-time job. And for those of you who are in a full-time job, the demands coming from two fronts can be excessive. Infertility is stressful enough even without the felt need to create forty-eight hours of every twenty-four.

Not only is infertility treatment physically and emotionally demanding, but no one knows at the outset how long it will take to resolve. One needs to be prepared to think of this journey as an endurance test. And of course, any endurance test is best completed if the reality of it is recognized and one paces oneself along the way.

It would be unreasonable to think that if you are well-mobilized you will never feel depressed or anxious. Of course you will, especially when the treatment does not result in a pregnancy right away. But the best way to make it to the end of the challenge course, it to nourish yourself as you go along. You would not think that you could drive from New York to California on one tank of gas. It can be useful to think that you need to fill your tank on this journey as well.

I wanted to share my observations with you about the strength and power of the human spirit in the context of the overwhelming challenge of infertility. If you accept as most people do these days the unity of mind and body, then be advised that the one thing that *will* facilitate the sustaining of your strength would be mind/body stress reduction techniques. The circularity of body effecting mind and mind effecting body is raised exponentially with infertility. It is important to learn how to discharge the tension and return your body to neutral with breathing exercises, gentle yoga, meditation of any kind, hypnosis or self-hypnosis or any of the myriad coping mechanisms that break the grip we normally put ourselves in when we are dealing with something that is overwhelming. Scrutinizing how much we might be caught in negative thinking so we can break that cycle is important, too. Basically, you will help yourself to hold on to the strength of your human spirit if you ask yourself what do you need in order to not give up before the miracle.

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