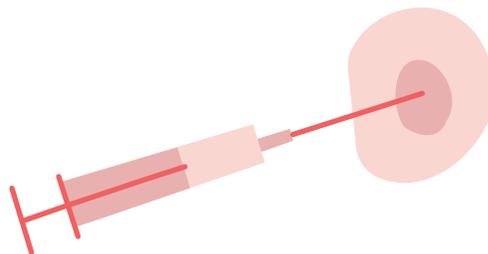
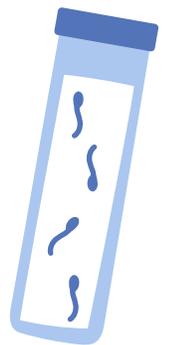
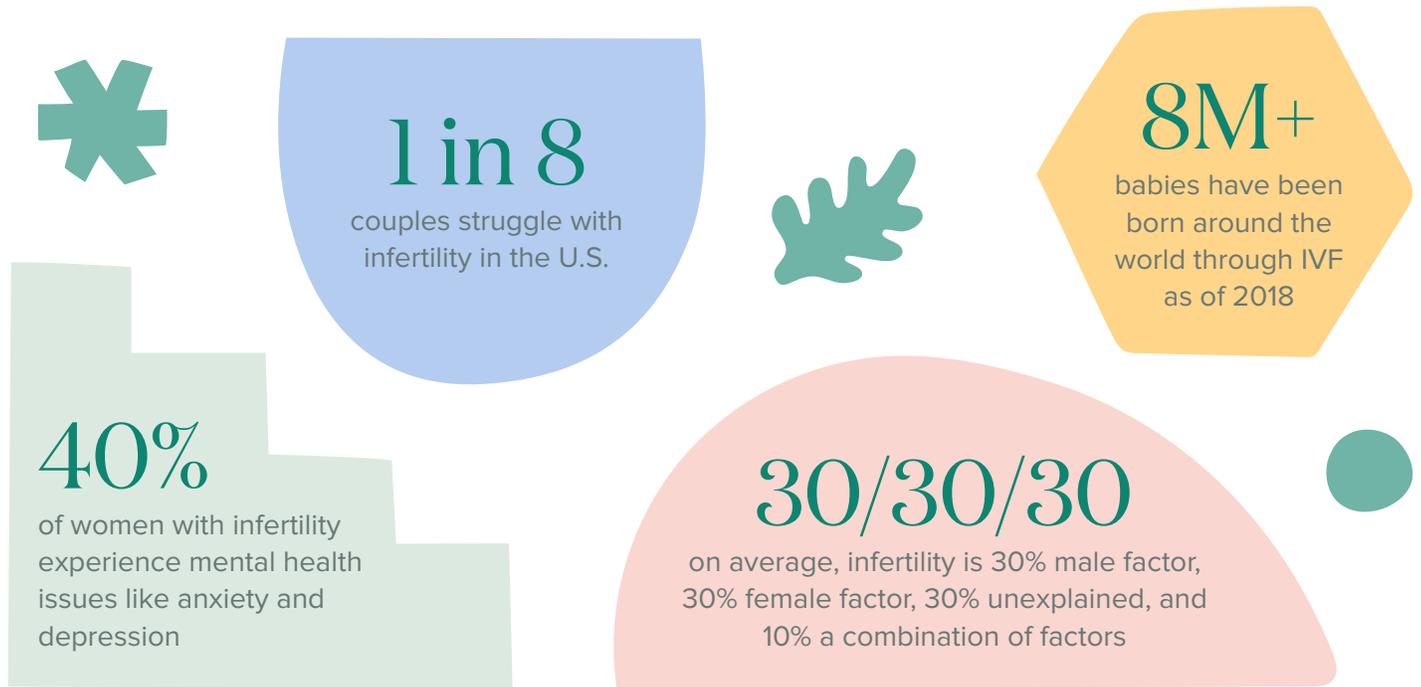


The ally's guide to infertility

The fertility journey can be a physical and emotional roller coaster. While infertility is incredibly common, impacting 1 in 8 couples in the U.S., unless you've been through it yourself, your understanding of what it means and how it's treated is likely pretty limited—and that's okay. That's what this guide is for. We're here to help you help the person in your life who is navigating infertility.



First, let's talk facts



The reality is, getting pregnant isn't as easy as we make it out to be. Even for healthy young couples in their peak fertility years, there's only a 20-25% chance of getting pregnant each month. There are also many causes that can make conceiving naturally even more challenging, including male factors (e.g. structural abnormalities or sperm production problems) and female factors (e.g. age, low egg count, endometriosis, hormonal imbalances). In 30% of cases, infertility is "unexplained."

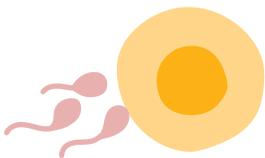
Heterosexual couples tend to turn to treatment options if they've been trying to conceive naturally for a year (for women under 35) or six months (for women over 35). By the time they arrive at seeking treatment, they've likely gone through a series of tests that led to a diagnosis of infertility.

Two of the most common fertility treatments you might hear about are Intrauterine Insemination (IUI) and In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). Understanding the basics of these treatments can help give you the foundation to be the best possible ally—though these treatments are far from basic. They can be complicated and vary from person to person. RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association and The American Society for Reproductive Medicine have great educational resources if you're interested in learning more.

What is IUI?

Intrauterine Insemination (IUI), also referred to as Artificial Insemination, involves putting sperm directly into the uterus around the time of ovulation to encourage fertilization. During this process, women may have to take a series of oral or injectable medications to stimulate ovulation or to increase the number of eggs they produce.

The insemination procedure is typically done at a doctor's office or fertility clinic and can be fairly quick. It's usually not painful and patients do not need anaesthesia. A doctor will then typically recommend a pregnancy test around two weeks after the procedure. Couples going through IUI can spend anywhere from \$500-\$4,000 on treatment.



What is IVF?

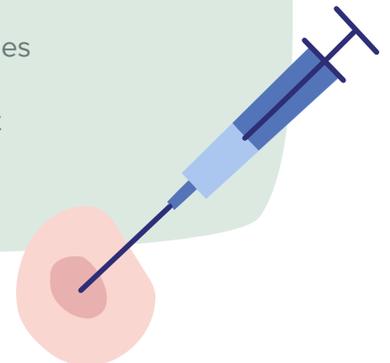
In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is a lengthier and more complex process than IUI and involves many different stages:

- 1. Ovarian stimulation:** includes self-administering daily hormone injections over the course of 9-12 days and frequent visits to the fertility clinic for ultrasounds
- 2. Egg retrieval:** an outpatient surgical procedure where eggs are removed from the ovaries
- 3. Fertilization:** the retrieved eggs are fertilized with sperm in the lab to create embryos
- 4. Embryo transfer:** involves transferring one (or more) embryo(s) into the uterus

IVF is considered one of the most effective treatment options for infertility, but it's not a guarantee that you'll become pregnant or stay pregnant. The average couple goes through roughly 2.5 cycles of IVF to conceive, spending \$12-25K on average per cycle.

Everyone experiences this journey differently, but some of the most common challenges include:

- Anxiety and fear about the outcome of treatment
- Mood swings from added hormones and other medications
- Financial pressure
- Stress about time away from work for appointments
- Sex and relationship issues
- Sensitivity to news about pregnancies and births





MELISSA STRAUSS

Maven Mental
Health provider

How you can help

Melissa Strauss, Maven Mental Health provider and licensed professional counselor specializing in infertility and parenting, shares her tips for supporting someone navigating infertility.

Let conversations about their fertility journey be on their terms.

They've told you they're going through fertility treatment - now what? This journey can be long and complicated and asking for status updates or peppering them with questions might make them feel worse. You can let them know you're thinking of them but let any updates or details on their treatment come from them.

Listen instead of trying to problem solve.

Thirty percent of infertility is unexplained, meaning there's often no clear answer to why they're not getting pregnant. Digging into why things aren't working or making suggestions based on what worked for someone else could add more frustration. The biggest thing you can do as an ally is to listen and make space for them to talk about how they're feeling.

When it comes to making plans, be understanding and stay flexible.

The IVF journey in particular requires near daily appointments, carefully timed injections, and lots of logistical details, which could mean plans could change last minute. If they need to reschedule, let them know you understand. If you want to suggest doing something together, give them options: Is this a wine night or a seltzer night? Do they want to go out to dinner or would they prefer if you drop off food? Try not to take it personally if they say no and are not up for plans.

Remember that this is their news to share, not yours.

Just because this person opened up to you about their fertility journey, it doesn't mean they want everyone else to know what they're going through. A mutual friend asks why she hasn't been responding to her texts? A co-worker is speculating about why she's been missing so many meetings? Make sure you're on the same page about what you can share with other people.

Be sensitive to sharing baby news.

When you're trying to get pregnant, hearing the news of someone else's pregnancy can be particularly triggering. If you yourself become pregnant or want to share the news of someone else in their life getting pregnant, be thoughtful about when and how you communicate this news. Doing it over email or text can be a good strategy so they can handle their immediate reaction privately.

Language matters

Even the most well-intentioned people can say something hurtful. Here are some responses to avoid and suggestions for what words might work better.

You can always adopt!

There are many ways to start a family, but the decision is personal and involves many emotional and logistical factors. Plus, adoption can be a long, complex, and expensive process too. It's not helpful to frame it as a backup plan.

You'll get through this, and I'm here for you no matter what.

Just have a glass of wine and relax.

If getting pregnant boiled down to relaxing, women would just invest in a nice vacation—not grueling reproductive technology. This advice minimizes the problem and just isn't all that helpful.

I know this process is stressful. Is there anything I can do to help make it more bearable for you?

Are you pregnant?

Let them come to you. When they have news to share, they'll share it. Asking for updates feeds into the impatience and frustration they're likely already experiencing.

I'm thinking of you and I hope you're feeling okay. How is [insert work, family or virtually any other topic here]?

Everything happens for a reason.

Be mindful of your audience. If this person is the type to subscribe to this belief, it might work. But if it's your view, not theirs, it can feel patronizing.

This is so hard. I'm so sorry you're dealing with this.

At least you have one kid!

For couples struggling with infertility after successfully giving birth, the journey comes with another web of emotions. Try not to minimize how they envision completing their family.

Is there anything I can do to help you with your older child to give you a break?

SOURCES: [resolve.org](https://www.resolve.org), [icmartivf.org](https://www.icmartivf.org), [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), [asrm.org](https://www.asrm.org)



Maven is the world's largest virtual clinic for women's and family health, offering personalized on-demand care from preconception through pediatrics. Maven's holistic fertility program supports women and families through all of the many challenges that come with starting a family, from finding a fertility clinic to connecting with specialists like reproductive endocrinologists, fertility nurse practitioners, and mental health providers 24/7.

Want to learn more? Visit mavenclinic.com.