

How infertility can impact mental health, plus tips for coping or providing support

About 1 in 5 women worldwide experiences infertility, and it can have a major emotional impact on both individuals and couples. Beyond the medical and physical issues, it is a difficult and deeply personal journey that can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and other emotional effects.

Below, the UAB Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility shares tips for coping with the challenges of infertility or supporting someone who is going through it.

The Emotional Rollercoaster

Grief and Loss:

Infertility can cause feelings of grief and loss. Pregnancy loss or unsuccessful attempts to conceive can lead to mourning and emotional distress.

Isolation:

Infertility often causes feelings of isolation and guilt. It's common for individuals and couples who are facing infertility to isolate themselves from social situations that can be painful for them. Relationships can be affected, too, as some may choose to avoid friends who have babies because it can create feelings of shame and guilt. Some may distance themselves from family members who ask about plans for pregnancy or give pregnancy advice.

Anxiety and Depression:

The uncertainty and emotional strain of infertility can trigger anxiety and depression. The cycle of hope, disappointment, and medical help can take a toll on mental well-being and cause stress.

Strategies for Coping

Open Communication:

Communicate openly and honestly with your partner. Share your thoughts, fears, and hopes with each other. This can strengthen your emotional connection and provide mutual support during challenging times.

Seek Professional Support:

Infertility often requires medical help, and seeking the assistance of a fertility specialist is important. Also, consider meeting with counselors or therapists who specialize in issues related to infertility.

Educate Yourself:

Understanding the medical aspects of infertility can help individuals and couples make more informed decisions about their treatment options. Knowing what to expect and being aware of options can ease some of the anxiety.

Join Support Groups:

Connecting with others who are going through similar experiences can be incredibly comforting. Support groups provide a platform to share experiences, exchange advice, and receive emotional support from a community that understands the unique challenges of infertility.

Self-Care:

Nurture your mental and emotional well-being by focusing on self-care. Relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, yoga, and expressive writing can greatly reduce anxiety. Physical activity and exercise may reduce stress and improve your emotions. Make sure to set aside time for things that bring you joy.

Set Boundaries:

It's important to set boundaries around conversations and activities related to fertility. Staying informed is important, but it's equally important to give yourself permission to step away from the constant focus on infertility to achieve a more balanced mental state.

If you are facing depression, anxiety, or other difficult emotions, help is available. Sharing your feelings with your partner, doctor, or a mental health professional can help. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, and no one has to face infertility alone.

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Awareness Association's help line (1-866-668-2566) provides information on support groups, professional counseling, and an online support community that can help sustain or improve your mental health on your journey to build a family.