



Information Statement – Surviving the Wait

For many, one of the most anxiety provoking times of infertility treatment is the wait following a treatment cycle, until either a period begins, or hopefully the first signs of pregnancy occur, and a pregnancy test is positive. Very few predictors are available to hazard more than either a positive outlook, of “it all went well this time”, or a negative outlook of “nothing went quite right”.

The reality is that most people enter this period hopeful that this will be the time. But there are two weeks to wait. Every body sign is highlighted, from pre-menstrual physical sensations, through to any other physical indicator conceivable. Most of these are kept by the woman to herself, fearing she may be wrong, and not wanting to upset her partner. The woman is mostly the one that knows the bad news first, initially denying all the tell-tale symptoms, but finally having no choice but to accept the inevitable. Likewise, for the good news, an air of cautious hope is usually maintained, until a confirmation is made, or obvious physical or emotional changes start to occur. Even then, caution is often maintained, just in case.

Even if the outcome is negative with accompanying feelings of sadness and disappointment, the end of the waiting period also gives a sense of relief. The outcome, although unwanted, is known, the waiting is over. The “not knowing” was seen as one of the most stressful elements of infertility treatment when this was assessed for Queensland couples.

The anticipatory anxiety through this waiting period presents a challenge to most and in particular, the woman within a couple. It was once recommended to go home and just relax, put your feet up, and don't do anything for two weeks - well, except fall apart mentally! Fortunately, the current recommendations of engaging in your normal activities of daily living are more in line with psychological need. Activities not recommended are those of a particularly stressful nature, such as aerobics, or other strenuous exercise.

So how do you handle this extra anxiety? Normal anxiety is handled by people in many different ways. Examples of these ways are: seeking information, regaining control over the situation, facing what you are anxious about, comparing yourself to those less fortunate, removing the cause of your anxiety, handling anxiety a bit at a time, or just denying it exists. Relaxation techniques, music, physical activity, exercise can help greatly. Of great help is talking to other people, especially those with an understanding of what you are experiencing, or who have experienced what is happening to you themselves. Finally, talking to each other is vital.

Unfortunately, these are great ways of coping with anxiety concerning a current situation, rather than the anxiety generated by having to await an outcome over which neither you, nor anyone else, have any control. Everything has been done. You have fulfilled your role; the doctors theirs, the scientists theirs, and the nurses and support staff theirs. It is now up to whatever, from divine wish to chance, depending upon your beliefs. The main element is how to get through these days. Nobody does this easily, and there are no wonderful, magical answers. Some ideas that may help are:-

1. Don't dwell on trying to predict from what has happened, how it will go. Unfortunately, we tend to highlight negative events rather than positive. We also lack predictors. Yes, your chances may be higher or lower than whatever, but you don't want chances, you want to be pregnant.
2. Keep yourself occupied with planned activities. These can include work, outings, shopping (to look or buy), hobbies, reading, sport, exercise, going away together for a few days, talking to other couples or friends who have similar experiences, the list is endless. Find extra ways of indulging yourselves – massage, a long soak in the bath, gourmet delights. It is useful to plan activities and, rather than expect you will want to do them, just do them anyway. Your concentration will be lowered, and your heart probably not fully in it, but activities do help time to pass.
3. When your mind starts to wander back to the inevitable thoughts, change what you are doing. Physically move, even if just to another chair. Go for a walk, cook, read and try to divert yourself. If at night, go and watch TV, or have a shower, and then go back to bed. It is difficult to change what you are thinking without a change in your physical self.
4. Facing the situation, experiencing the anxiety, or seeking more knowledge is not going to help much at this stage for most people. So do avoid thinking, become a semi-robot if possible.
5. Get into tasks that help relieve your frustrations, but require little thinking power. These can include cleaning the car, the house, mowing the lawn, or cleaning out the cupboards. Some people say they find the structure of their work place helpful and prefer to be back at work. Others decide, with experience, that the need to be focussed at work increases their anxiety level and they decide to take some time off during treatment cycles.

6. Express your frustrations to your partner or a close friend to let some of your tension escape. But going over and over it is not going to be useful during this waiting period.
7. Try relaxation techniques, bring your anxiety down, and then go and divert your attention to other activities. Make a time to see our Counsellor if you would like some support with learning some techniques for relaxation.
8. Do give each other extra attention and make sure he/she knows that you care. Flowers or other tokens of esteem and love are appreciated.
9. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea, chocolate substances, cola drinks. Eat regular meals but do not over eat.

Contact us

If you would like further information, please contact flindersfertility on 131 IVF (131 483) or by email enquire@flindersfertility.com.au