



Choosing Solo Parenthood

Navigating IVF as a solo mum to be

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In recent years, there has been an upward trend in the number of women embarking on solo parenting using donor sperm. In fact, over half the donor cycles being completed at Flinders Fertility are now by single women.

The motivations behind this are as varied and unique as the women themselves, but they also reflect a changing societal landscape. Some women choose this path as they haven't met the partner who they feel is right to parent with, while others wish to embark on solo parenthood on their own terms knowing they have a supportive network in place to help them if required.

While individual success rates may vary based on factors such as age and overall health, the chances of a successful pregnancy through artificial reproductive techniques such as IVF are higher than ever before. In your late 20s or early 30s, and assuming you have no underlying health issues, you will likely have a short IVF journey. From our most recent clinical data in 2023, 56% of under 30s became pregnant, and 46% of 30-34s¹.

If you have a condition such as endometriosis or PCOS, then it may require more than one cycle.

However, navigating the world of IVF solo comes with its own set of challenges and considerations. Below we discuss these topics to help aspiring solo parents make informed decisions:

1. Finding the right fertility clinic
2. Treatment options – IUI and IVF
3. The treatment journey for solo parents
4. Choosing a donor
5. The dangers of unregulated donation
6. Finding your support system
7. Improving your chances of success
8. The costs

Not quite ready yet?

If you're thinking about having children but not ready to start a family on your own just yet, you might want to consider freezing your eggs to help preserve your fertility and give yourself a greater chance of pregnancy success in the future.

1. Finding the right fertility clinic

When selecting a fertility clinic as a solo mum-to-be, factors such as success rates, the expertise of the medical team and the availability of support services such as counselling should be considered. Additionally, the clinic's approach to donor selection and the screening process can greatly impact your overall experience.

It's advisable to find a fertility clinic which aligns best with your personal preferences and goals. Researching clinics' websites and joining online forums of solo parents who have undergone IVF can provide valuable insights.

Flinders Fertility supports families of all types including same sex couples using donor conception, fertility preservation where one or both partners are transitioning, and of course, solo mums.

2. Treatment options

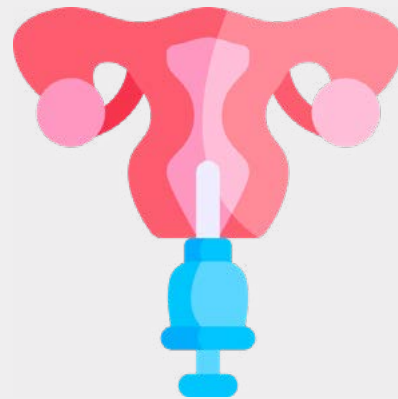
There will be individual factors that play a role in determining which treatment offers you the best chance of success. Your fertility specialist will take a detailed history and order tests.

They'll discuss your results and options to help you decide which type of treatment is right for you.

Broadly there are two options for donor insemination:

- Intrauterine Insemination (IUI)
- In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

IUI



Intrauterine insemination is a procedure in which sperm are placed directly into the uterus. Intrauterine insemination can be done in time with your body's natural ovulation cycle, or through stimulated ovulation, using hormones to stimulate the ovaries and trigger ovulation.

If you are naturally producing low levels of the ovulatory hormones, or do not naturally ovulate, you may be prescribed either an oral medication that encourages the body to produce more follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). Even if your body ovulates normally on its own, you may choose or be recommended, this process as it gives some control over the whole procedure.

Before the IUI procedure, the semen sample is analysed and washed to concentrate the moving sperm. The final prepared sample for insemination is then gently inserted into the uterine cavity using a speculum and small catheter.

The procedure itself feels much like having a cervical screening, so while you may feel some cramping, you should be able to continue with your day straight afterwards.

Whilst being a lower-intervention option, IUI tends to have a lower success rate than IVF and often more than one cycle will be required.

Our most recent data shows that 22% of our donor IUI patients across all age groups became pregnant². Around 10% became pregnant on their first cycle³. The Fertility Society of Australia reports that 60% of IUI patients will conceive within six cycles⁴.

IVF



IVF treatment is a process where eggs are collected from the ovaries and fertilised in the laboratory. Over the period of six days the fertilised eggs are monitored to see if they develop into blastocysts which is the first stage of embryo development.

Our scientists carefully check each embryo and choose the best for implantation.

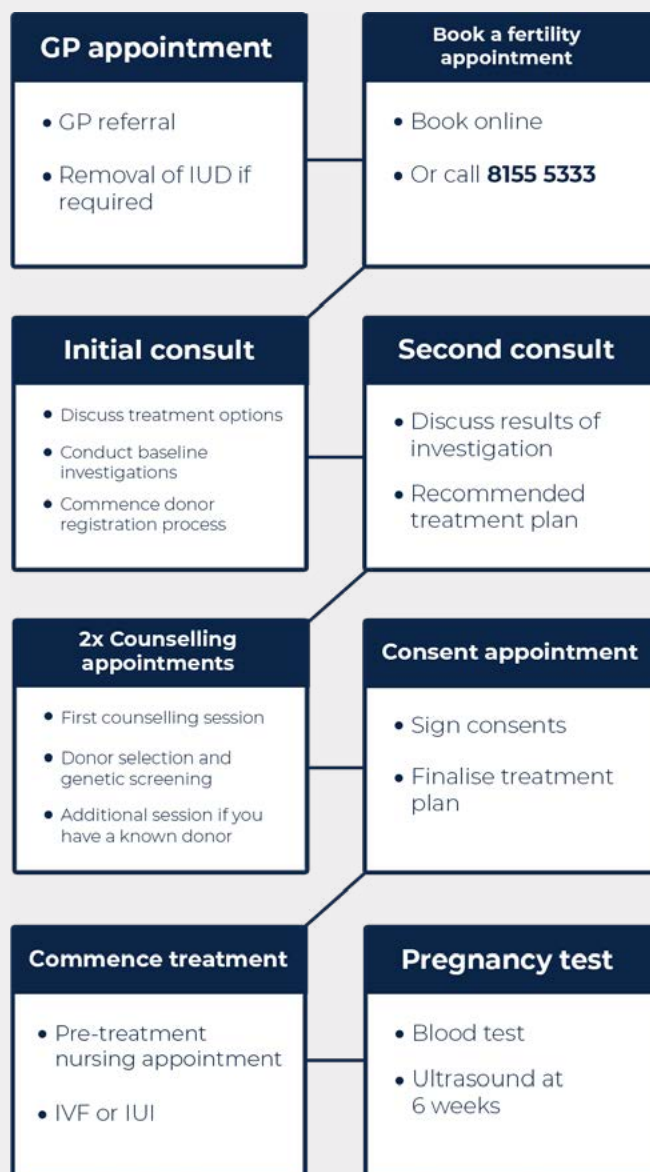
This single embryo is then placed into the uterus with the hope that it will result a successful pregnancy.

Success rates for IVF can vary, but our latest data from 2023 shows that 46% of women aged 30-34 became pregnant and 43.6%⁵ across all age groups. This includes fresh and frozen transfers.

If you have more than one embryo, they can be frozen for you to try to have a future sibling for your child. Once your family is complete you may choose to discard any remaining embryos or donate them to patients who cannot have biological children themselves.

3. The treatment journey for solo parents

We understand that you may feel both excited and anxious when making the decision to start a family. Here is an outline of the process at Flinders Fertility.



From the time of your first appointment it generally takes around three to six months before you can start treatment.

Sometimes the amount of information you are presented with can feel overwhelming, however our trained fertility nurses and donor coordinator can answer any questions you have – just ask at your appointment or feel free to call on **8155 5333**. If they aren't immediately available, they'll call you back.

4. Choosing a donor

Each fertility clinic has their own donor options. At Flinders Fertility, we offer three options:

1. Clinic-recruited local donors:

Flinders Fertility has a number of local donors. All the donors have been assessed, counselled and medically screened. Local donor profiles are provided to you with non-identifying information about the donor's physical characteristics, social and medical history. Where possible, similar information is also recorded about the donor's parents. Donors are also asked to provide a personal statement to recipients about their motivation for donating.

2. Overseas donors:

Flinders Fertility has an agreement with the Seattle Sperm Bank (SSB) which is one of the most well-known in the world. The SSB donors comply with all Australian legislative requirements. There is typically more information supplied about these donors, such as GPA scores, childhood photographs and sometimes an audio recording of their voice.

3. Client recruited (or "known")

donors: This is a man who is known to the patient and agrees to be her sperm donor. He will need to be assessed and screened for eligibility. As clinic recruited donors are, known donors also have to agree to be open to the disclosure of his identity to any donor conceived children.

Some parents value the opportunity to connect their child with their 'diblings' (donor siblings) as a form of support to each other. Please let our counsellors know if this is of interest but please note that this is only available in circumstances where both families agree to be identified.

5. The dangers of using unregulated donors

There are several internet forums and Facebook Groups run by men offering to be donors. Whilst it may be tempting to cut costs and go down this pathway there are several things to consider.

Firstly, the lack of regulation and oversight on these platforms increases the chances of encountering fraudulent or unreliable donors who may misrepresent their health status, genetic history, previous number of donations and number of children born. These factors could put you and your future children at risk.

Some men advertise that donation has to be "natural" (i.e. through sex) or offer free donation at a hotel then after meeting, say that they will only donate "naturally" thus putting women at risk of STIs.

The lack of medical screening and genetic testing raises serious concerns about the potential transmission of genetic diseases or undisclosed health risks to the baby.

When using unregulated forums to connect with sperm donors, another concerning risk is the potential for a child to have numerous biological half-siblings from the same donor. This situation might lead to inadvertent consanguinity if these half-siblings are unaware of each other's existence, potentially resulting in accidental incestuous relationships in the future.

Finally, the seemingly lower cost of this option may be an illusion. Women report that the costs of flying to meet donors who are often interstate, and having to book hotel rooms, in many cases outweighs the costs of going the regulated clinic route.

6. Finding your support system

Having a strong support network of friends and family really helps to navigate the inevitable emotional bumps in the road.



Some (though in our experience not that many) solo parents need to process and grieve for the life they had envisioned for themselves – one that included a partner to start a family.

Donor counsellors

Seeking professional help, such as therapy or counselling, can be enormously helpful when navigating through treatment and possible outcomes.



At Flinders Fertility, we require all patients accessing the donor pathway to undertake a minimum of two counselling sessions. Our counsellors, Julie and Emma, can help you process your feelings and provide a safe place to explore your thoughts. They'll also equip you with valuable information on how, when, and why it's important to inform your child that they are donor conceived.

Discussions will include:

- Whether you are open to finding and meeting your donor's other offspring
- How to discuss your decision with family and friends
- How you will feel if your child decides to contact your donor when they come of age
- The legal aspects of donor-conceived families

Counselling with a known donor

If you are using a known donor, they will be required to meet with our counsellor on two occasions to discuss the implications of sperm donation. Donors who have a partner will be asked to come to at least one of these meetings. A joint counselling session is then held between all parties involved to ensure that everyone is aware and comfortable with the others' intentions and future expectations.

Forums for Solo Mums

Connecting with other solo parents who have undergone IVF can provide a sense of solidarity and support. These website and Facebook groups may be helpful:

- [Solo mums by choice Australia](#)
- [Single Mothers by Choice Australia](#) (with an SA subgroup that meets regularly)
- [IVF Friends of Flinders Fertility](#) (this is run by patients of Flinders Fertility)



7. Improving your chances of success



Being mentally and physically fit will improve your chances of having a healthy pregnancy. We encourage you to:

- Strive to be in a healthy weight range as being overweight is often a flag that there may be other underlying hormonal health issues.
- Restrict your alcohol intake.
- Don't smoke.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Cut back on caffeine.
- Start taking a folate supplement.
- Exercise regularly.
- Care for your psychological wellbeing.
- Avoid contact with toxic chemicals in your work and home environments.

8. The Costs of Donor IVF/IUI

There's no way to sugar-coat this – IVF and IUI are not cheap. The costs associated with IVF include fertility clinic fees, medications, donor fees (if applicable), and additional procedures such as genetic testing. Unfortunately, Medicare rebates are only available if you are found to have an underlying condition that impacts your fertility (such as endometriosis, PCOS, etc).

Our website has an up-to-date prices schedule that lists our fees, and our finance team will provide you with an overview of the donor treatment costs at your initial appointment. You will receive a personalised quotation once you have decided on your donor and the type of treatment you will undertake. Some costs, including medications, anaesthetists and day surgery fees are in addition to our fees.

There are some options available to help manage the financial burden. At Flinders Fertility we offer discounted fees for concession card holders as well as ZIP Pay (to spread your costs over time) and Super Pay (to access the early release of your superannuation for medical procedures).

To find out more about treatment option and costs you can [book a free nurse chat](#) or ask to speak to our finance team.

Book an appointment

Want to know more?

A great first step is to speak to our patient care coordinator about your next steps, or you can make an appointment with a Flinders Fertility Doctor.

Just call 8155 5333 to arrange.

References:

1. Flinders Fertility Clinical Data. Clinical pregnancy outcomes using donor sperm IVF based on cycle dates 01/01/22 – 23/09/23
2. Flinders Fertility Clinical Data. Clinical pregnancy outcomes for IUI with donor sperm based on cycle dates 01/01/21 – 23/9/23
3. Flinders Fertility Analysis of data for clinical pregnancy by IUI transfer attempt 2021- 2023
4. The Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand
5. Flinders Fertility Clinical Data. Clinical pregnancy outcomes using donor sperm IVF based on cycle dates 01/01/22 – 23/09/23