

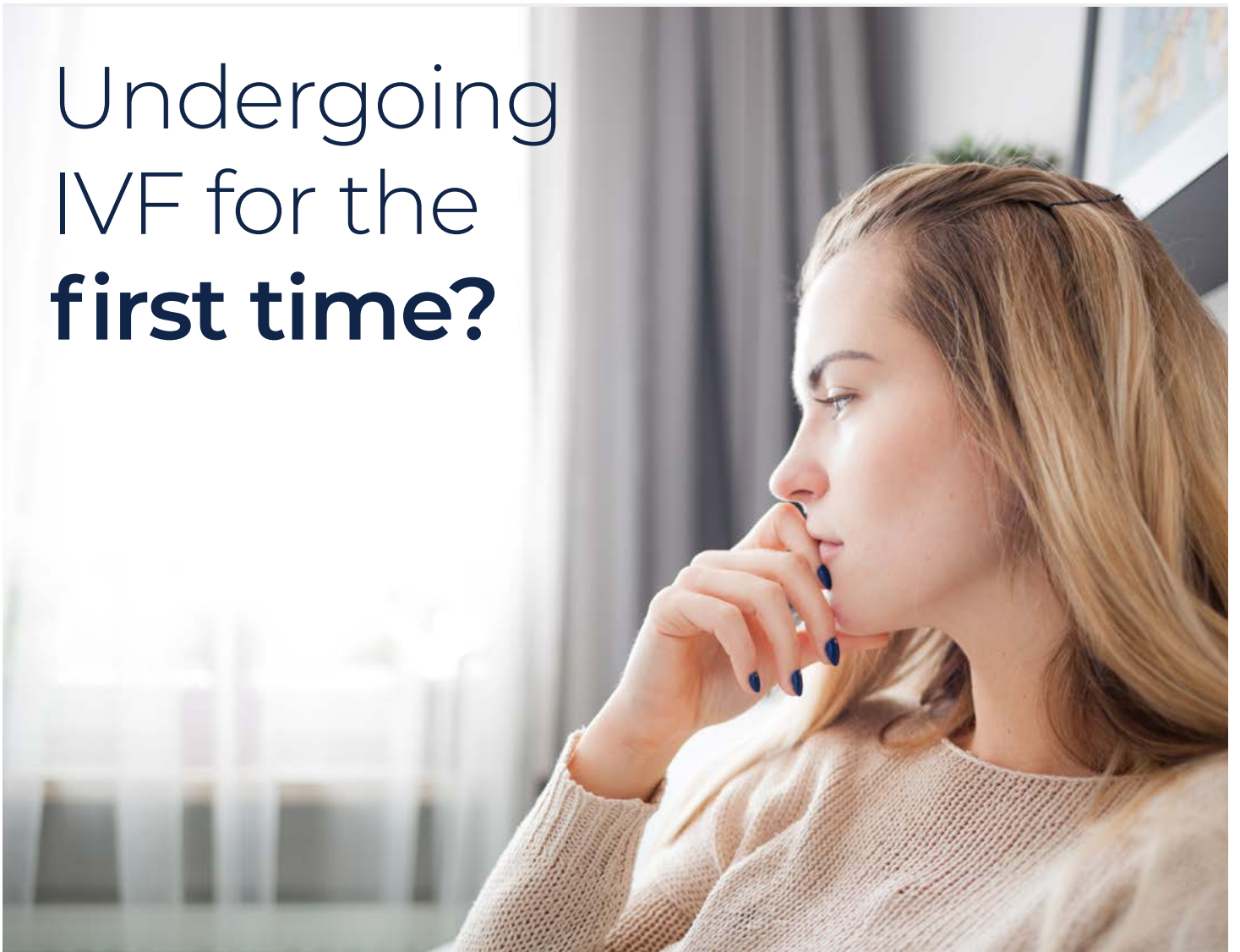


Navigating the Ups and Downs of IVF

SA'S IVF LEADER SINCE 1982



Undergoing IVF for the first time?



We know that undergoing IVF can be an emotional rollercoaster, not just because our patients tell us, but because some of our team have been through IVF too.

They have contributed to this article with their first-hand experience of living with infertility.

Note that not all patients will require IVF. At Flinders Fertility, we try for the most suitable and holistic approach to your treatment, which could include IUI (intrauterine insemination) and OI (Ovulation Induction).

That said, infertility and all forms of treatment can be emotionally, mentally, financially and physically draining so you may still find this guide helpful.

Getting Started

So, you've just taken the first steps on your IVF journey and treatment is underway. Like many first-time IVF patients, you have probably already found a huge swathe of information online to help prepare you for what lies ahead.

There is a lot of information about the process itself, and what happens at each step. What is often missing is how IVF can impact on your day-to-day life and your emotions. This guide will address some of the issues that are harder to talk about, and not so readily covered so buckle in for the ride ahead.

1. Be kind to yourself

IVF can take a toll on your mental health. Most couples have already been 'trying' to start a family for months or even years before they have turned to medical assistance and everything that it entails – tracking ovulation and cycles, taking supplements, watching what you eat and drink, and so much more.



Now is not the time to be adding other stressful events into your life. If you can, make sure you look after yourself as much as possible while you are undertaking treatment. Sure, we still have to work and keep daily life ticking along, but **balance is key.**

Take half an hour each day to do something you love that brings you joy – whether it is reading, stretching, walking, or just chilling. Don't underestimate how much this can help your mental health and keep you focused and ready for what lies ahead.

2. Work out the logistics of treatment

IVF generally involves a lot of disruption and appointments. This can be difficult to accommodate, especially if you are working, caring for others, have sporting or other commitments.

For a couple of weeks, your time is not your own - you will be attending regular blood tests; one or more ultrasound appointments; you will need to book in for your egg retrieval procedure with only two days' notice; and be available for your embryo transfer a few days later.

You will need to have someone who can collect you from day surgery and stay with you overnight afterwards, whether a partner, friend, family member, etc.

If your partner is having a procedure at the same time – e.g. surgical sperm – then you will need to find someone who is willing to collect both of you and stay with you overnight.

Before starting treatment, think through who you need to inform

and if you need their support, **check their availability** before starting treatment.

If you are working, you may want to **let your immediate colleagues know** what you are going through to pre-empt any awkwardness

around needing time off for appointments.

In our experience, many workplaces are happy to accommodate you once they understand that you are undertaking treatment.

3. Prepare yourself for ups and downs



Surviving IVF often means steeling yourself for unexpected curveballs, unhelpful comments and—disappointments: the four follicles you see on scan may only deliver two eggs; the nine eggs collected may not fertilise; the three embryos biopsied may all be aneuploid; your cycle may be cancelled by your doctor due to under-response; you may not be able to have an embryo transfer due to risk of OHSS; your partner may not be able to produce a sample on the day of your procedure – the list of possibilities is endless. **It is important not to think of these outcomes as a failure.**

Sometimes, doctors may not have a full picture of your reproductive

health until IVF is undertaken; some people react differently to certain medications; one person's cycle can be very different to another's; a healthy sperm test can sometimes change into a very poor sample at the time of treatment.

Be aware that treatment may need to change, and unexpected issues may arise.

Keep in mind that sometimes, more than one round of IVF may be required before you are able to start a family. Hope for the best but prepare yourself for the possibility that it may not happen the first time around.

4. The cost

There's no getting away from the fact that IVF is an expensive process. The amount you may need to spend to get pregnant can take some adjusting to.

It is easy to get stressed about the cost involved, and to feel the great injustice of so many people managing to get pregnant without spending a cent.

At Flinders Fertility, we have some financial solutions we can offer our patients to help reduce some of this stress - including Zip. Some couples may also be able to access their superannuation to cover some of the cost of treatment.

Take a look at our [financial assistance page](#) to see what options may be available to you or make an appointment with our finance team.

5. Patience really is a virtue

IVF can take a long time. We all know that when you are really enjoying yourself, time has a way of whizzing by way too fast. The opposite can be true as well. When you are really focused on something, it can feel like an eternity waiting for it to happen.



Often, once you have started IVF treatment, you have already been trying to start a family for quite some time without success.

We understand that this can mean that you just want it to happen, and you want it to happen right now. You've been waiting long enough! It might sound cliché, but IVF really is a rollercoaster ride. You will have good days, and not-so-good days. Acceptance of and permission to feel a range of emotions is important, and normal!

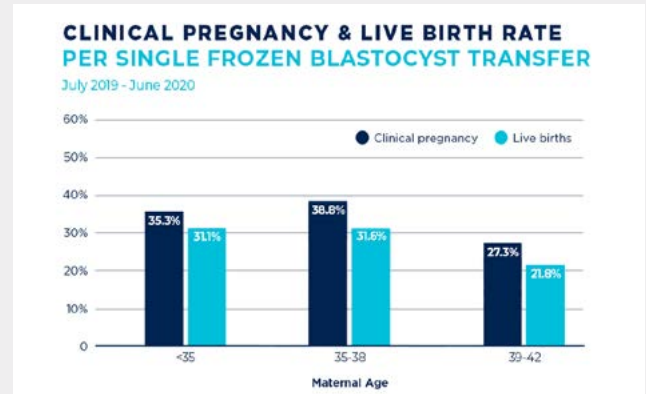
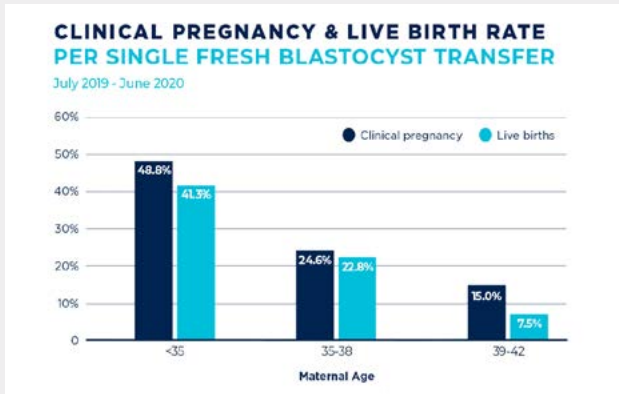
Have a good cry, let yourself feel white-hot with rage, feel jealousy at friends that fall pregnant easily, and feel the loneliness that can accompany you along this path. Feel it all, and then try to move on.

About one in six couples have trouble getting pregnant, you are not alone. Sometimes focusing on the camaraderie this brings can be more uplifting. We know this is easier said than done but a positive mindset will go a long way.

6. There's no guarantee

IVF gives you a chance to start a family. Although IVF increases your chance of pregnancy, it does not guarantee that you will get pregnant.

The chances of pregnancy will depend on a range of factors, including the age of a woman's eggs, the health of the man's sperm and other factors particular to each couple. Here at Flinders Fertility, on average, 41.3% of fresh IVF cycles for women aged under 35 result in live births, and this success rate decreases with age.



7. Don't forget your partner

While you are in the throes of an IVF cycle, your hormones are all over the place and it can feel like you are bearing most of the burden of trying to start a family. It is easy to forget that this is a stressful time for your partner as well.

Allow them to be part of the process. Perhaps it can be their job to do the injections, and they might be able to help with a little post-injection ritual, ice cream after injection perhaps?

Although they don't experience the physical journey in the same way, it is still a very emotional time for them.

Make sure you keep talking openly with each other along the way and remind them that they have access to [counselling](#) too.



8. Self care

Stress management

Feeling anxious and stressed is a very normal response when we feel like we are up against challenges or loss. It may feel like all your vulnerabilities are coming to the surface. It can be common to play out the worst-case scenario in our minds, especially thoughts related to future health and fertility.



The next column contains some coping strategies that you may find useful to manage feelings of anxiety or stress and help you feel more in control. These strategies can be used now or at any point in your life where you might need to re-centre and take more care of yourself.

- Establish routines and make a plan.
- Stay connected with people.
- Practice a breathing or relaxation technique.
- Set boundaries – it’s okay to say no
- Take care of your body.
- Practice good sleep habits.
- Maintain hope and balanced thinking.
- Practice self-care that brings joy.
- It’s okay to ask for help.

Here’s a link to an article on [stress reducing strategies](#) for further advice.

Exercise

There is a lot of information (and quite a bit of misinformation) about exercising during your IVF cycle. You’ve probably heard everything from “stop exercising during IVF” to “it’s okay to exercise, BUT not too much” and given advice to avoid some particular types of exercise altogether.

In a nutshell, what we do know is that exercise is important to all women and the best message is to keep moving, though you may need to modify your usual routine:

- No high-impact exercise with quick changes in body position (such as Cross Fit/Body Attack, etc).
- Walking or light jogging is good, but no quick twisting.
- Swimming is great, but no flip turns at the end of the lane.
- Gentle yoga is encouraged, but no inversions or twists.
- Light weights only.

9. Your tribe

Having support is essential and will make your journey so much easier. If you are comfortable discussing your fertility with others, talking with family, friends, and others who have gone through infertility can help.



Online chat groups can also be a really helpful as everyone is going through the same journey. [IVF Friends of Flinders Fertility Facebook support group](#) is one our patients suggest. Although we are not part of the group, it has been established by some of our patients and we've been told that it's used to share personal stories and provide support to members undergoing the process.

Nurse Chats

At Flinders Fertility, we have a team of experienced fertility nurses who are available to chat to you on the phone when you need support. Whether you are unsure about your medication, can't remember your chart or have any other questions about the process – **[just call us.](#)**

Counselling and support

It's okay to ask for help. We know that the emotional and physical demands of IVF can take their toll. Because of this, we offer [free counselling](#) and support sessions with a professionally qualified fertility counsellor for all our patients. These confidential chats can arm you with tools and strategies to help keep you going when the going gets tough, and normalise your experiences and feelings.

Sometimes, making an appointment can be a way for you to acknowledge yourself, your strengths and honour your feelings in a safe and non-judgmental place.

Find out more about what our counsellors can offer you.

In short, IVF is a demanding and grueling process. Reaching out for help when you need it and spending time talking about your emotions and feelings can be a healing way to process everything that is happening.

After reading through these tips, we hope you are more prepared and know that going through IVF can be a tough but very rewarding process.

Further Resources

The fertility news section of our website has loads more useful information. Some examples are:

- [Top 10 High Folate Foods](#)
- [Are Essential Oils Safe when Trying to Conceive?](#)
- [Exercising During IVF](#)
- [Vitamins and Supplements that support fertility](#)
- [Can Complementary Therapies like Acupuncture help Conception?](#)
- [7 Tips to Manage the Two Week Wait](#)
- [Effects of Methamphetamines on Fertility and In Pregnancy](#)
- [Detox Your Home \(eBook\)](#)
- [Boost Your Natural Fertility \(eBook\)](#)

Need some support?

If you're looking for some support from our fertility counsellors: [Click here](#) or call **08 8155 5333**