

IS IT TIME TO STOP IUI AND START IVF?

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Without question, artificial insemination is a true blessing for many couples today. Pregnancy success rates are as high as 20 percent per cycle—depending on several factors including a woman's age and her partner's sperm count. But sometimes, it's more prudent to spend a bit more time (and money) to achieve your dream of growing your family. How might you know when enough IUI is enough?

LET'S START WITH THE BASICS.

Intrauterine insemination (IUI) is an infertility treatment that is commonly called artificial insemination. In this procedure, specially prepared sperm are inserted into the woman's uterus. The woman's spouse or a donor may provide the sperm. Some women are also treated with medicines that stimulate ovulation before IUI.

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) includes *all* fertility treatments in which both eggs and sperm are handled. ART usually involves **in vitro fertilization (IVF)**. In IVF, ovulation is induced with injectable fertility medications so that multiple eggs are produced. Healthy sperm are combined with the eggs in a laboratory. Three to five days after the egg retrieval procedure, the fertilized eggs, or embryos, are then transferred to the uterus through the vagina.

In IVF, the sperm may come from the woman's spouse or from a donor. It may be retrieved and then frozen for later use in IVF. The egg also may come from a donor. Eggs that have been previously frozen can be used.

Sometimes, one sperm may be injected into each egg in a technique called **intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)**. ICSI is often recommended if there is a problem with sperm quality or quantity. In ICSI, only a single healthy sperm is needed for each egg.

REASONS TO CHOOSE IUI

The most common reasons for IUI are a low sperm count or decreased sperm motility. IUI may also be a good option for:

- Unexplained infertility
- A hostile cervical condition, including cervical mucus problems
- Cervical scar tissue from past procedures
- Ejaculation dysfunction
- The use of donor sperm

Success rates for IUI depend on your infertility problem and your age. Most couples who turn to IUI have a 10 to 20 percent chance of becoming pregnant with each cycle. The chances will be closer to 20 percent if you take fertility drugs in conjunction with the procedure.

REASONS TO CHOOSE IVF

IVF is often recommended for couples who have failed to conceive after one year of trying as well as those with three or four failed treatment cycles of IUI with “superovulation” stimulation.

You should also consider IVF if you have one or more of the following:

- Severe male factor infertility
- Women over the age of 38
- Women with blocked fallopian tubes
- Women with a history of pelvic infections
- Women with moderate to severe endometriosis
- Women with reduced ovarian reserve as indicated by a simple blood test

Many couples choose IVF because it helps them conceive more quickly. Other benefits include the ability to use frozen eggs and/or sperm as well as donor eggs.

WHAT’S THE BEST OPTION FOR YOU?

While IUI is a less invasive and less expensive option, pregnancy rates from IUI are much lower than those from IVF.

According to the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology, the national rates of pregnancy with IVF in 2012 were 46.7 percent for women under the age of 35; 37.8 percent for women ages 35 to 37; and 29.7 percent for women ages 38 to 40. The pregnancy rates for women ages 41 to 42 is 19.8 percent and drops to 8.6 percent for women older than 42.

Talk to an infertility specialist to discuss your available options, based on your age, reproductive health and other circumstances. You should also seek the help of a specialist if you have been trying to get pregnant for six months or more.

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