

Conception Misconceptions

Nancy Mullins for Texas Fertility Center

Family planning advice from one of Austin's premier fertility specialists

When a couple walks in the doors of Texas Fertility Center (TFC), they have already listened to the advice of friends and family, and likely have incorporated a few "old wives tales" into their reproductive action plan.

"We have heard it all, from eating yams to wearing briefs," says Dr. Kaylen Silverberg, a reproductive endocrinologist (fertility specialist) and Texas Fertility Center founding physician. "Our conversations always start with reassurances that infertility is not your fault; it is a medical issue, a disease that can almost always be overcome with targeted treatment."

Since 1980, TFC has welcomed over 13,000 babies into the world, and readily shares insights and best practices for optimizing fertility.

The Miracle of Conception

When you consider what needs to occur to conceive a child, it's a miracle that pregnancy happens at all. Here's what happens in a successful reproductive cycle:

- Hormonal signals trigger egg development and ovulation in women, and sperm production in men.
- After maturing in one of the two ovaries, a single egg, one of a finite number a woman is born with, gets released and hopefully picked up by the fallopian tube.
- A complex sperm delivery system prepares and releases sperm.
- One sperm out of an ejaculate of millions must swim through a woman's cervical mucus, into and through the uterus, and then into the fallopian tube.
- The sperm must then penetrate through the protective shell around the waiting egg.
- The fertilized egg then must travel down the tube into the uterus where it burrows into the uterine lining to receive nourishment to grow into a healthy pregnancy.

The odds of pregnancy in any given month are around 20 percent. Most couples, 85 percent or so, will conceive after one year of unprotected sex. If you have tried for more than a year (or six months for women over 35), the odds are stacked against getting pregnant on your own, and it's wise to seek medical intervention.

Misconception #1: If I just relax, I'll get pregnant on my own.

Don't delay seeking treatment. A fertility specialist can pinpoint the cause, and quickly move you toward resolution.

Understanding the Causes of Infertility

As soon as you believe you may have a problem, you should call a fertility specialist. Dr. Silverberg recommends that both partners attend the initial consultation, as you will discuss the fertility tests that will be recommended in order to determine the cause(s) of your problem. These tests may include everything from simple blood testing and sonograms, through outpatient diagnostic procedures.

Misconception #2: Infertility is a female problem.

Approximately half of all cases are due to male factors, such as a low sperm count or abnormal sperm function.

Men may be surprised to know that, in some cases, simple lifestyle changes may really boost their fertility potential. Overheating the testicles, in hot tubs, or in certain high-heat workplaces, can hinder the body's ability to produce healthy sperm.

Inherited conditions, hormonal imbalances, pelvic infections, or anatomic irregularities can also lead to male infertility. These same issues – plus endometriosis – are also responsible for most cases of female infertility.

The most common cause of female infertility, abnormal ovulation, also happens to be the easiest to correct – usually with simple fertility medications.

Seeking Treatment for Infertility

Partnering with a fertility specialist will feel like a turning point. The effective options available today remove the barriers to conception for the vast majority of couples.

You may wonder how far you will go to conceive a child, and Dr. Silverberg offers reassurance.

“Our most recommended course of action is often the least invasive path to pregnancy,” says Dr. Silverberg. “Although we can employ the latest leading-edge technologies to help patients overcome even the seemingly impossible, such as the absence of sperm (azoospermia) or genetic problems, most cases of infertility are far easier to correct.”

Misconception #3: A fertility specialist will always recommend IVF.
Only 20 percent of people who see a fertility specialist will require the advanced reproductive technology afforded by in vitro fertilization, IVF.

Partnering with a Fertility Specialist when You Are Not Infertile

The majority of patients who seek the care of a fertility specialist suffer from male or female infertility, but TFC also helps fertile individuals and couples reach their reproductive potential. You might be surprised to learn how the latest medical advances are changing lives right here in Austin and Round Rock:

Fertility Preservation and Fertility Rescue

A new technology enables the Austin IVF lab to preserve and protect fertility through elective egg freezing. This procedure offers hope to both women who are not yet ready to conceive, and those facing treatment for cancer or other serious disease.

Donor Services

Sometimes Mother Nature needs a little help. Third-party reproduction (donor eggs, donor sperm and gestational surrogacy) helps infertile couples, as well as same-sex couples and single women, start or add to their families.

Preconception Genetic Testing

Learning your carrier status is as simple as a blood draw. TFC recommends that all couples that hope to start a family consider preconception carrier testing. A blood

test can predict your chances for passing along single gene disorders like Tay-Sachs disease, found in about 1 in every 27 members of the Ashkenazi Jewish population.

Misconception #4: If I carry the Tay Sachs gene, I will pass it along to my children.

Don't let the fear of passing along genetic diseases such as cystic fibrosis or Tay Sachs stop you from starting a family. With preimplantation genetic diagnosis, we can transfer only unaffected embryos during a cycle of IVF – hopefully eliminating this disease from your family forever.

Of all of the suggestions offered by the Texas Fertility Center team, the one that carries the most weight is this: Don't delay seeking treatment. The more time that passes, the more difficult it is to overcome infertility.

Misconception #5: I can easily get pregnant after 40 with the help of fertility treatment.

Don't believe the Hollywood hype. The negative impact of age on a woman's eggs is irreversible. After age 35, the quantity and quality of a woman's egg supply rapidly diminish. Fertility treatment improves your odds, but advanced maternal age makes it difficult to conceive.

Fertility myths can waste precious time while you are trying to conceive. Once you suspect a problem with natural conception, consider making an appointment with a fertility specialist. Meanwhile, maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle, and track your menstrual cycle to pinpoint your most fertile window. For most couples, a home pregnancy test will be the most high-tech tool you will ever need.

Texas Fertility Center was founded by Drs. Thomas Vaughn, Kaylen Silverberg, and Lisa Hansard. Over the years, its physician team has grown to include: Natalie Burger, M.D., Summer James, M.D. and Anthony Propst, M.D. The original location in Central Austin has now expanded to include fertility clinics in Round Rock, North Austin, South Austin and San Antonio. Recognized annually by Best Doctors in America and Best Doctors in Texas, Texas Fertility Center is one of the premier fertility centers in the U.S. Visit www.txfertility.com or call (512) 451-0149.