Managing stress & anxiety through IVF treatment
Stress and anxiety are natural responses when we are frightened or threatened in any way. Fertility problems and IVF treatment can represent a threat to your control, future dreams, self-esteem, intimate relationships with your partner, other relationships and overall sense of normality.

No wonder you feel anxious.
A level of stress and anxiety is almost inevitable in IVF, however there is no convincing evidence from research to prove that stress levels affect the outcome of treatment. In fact, stress and anxiety can be productive, for example, in helping identify problems and feeling motivated to solve them. This brochure gives some practical guidance on responding to situations where stress and anxiety have become obstacles to effective living.

Stress and anxiety can present in many ways:

- Physical symptoms, including muscle tension, exhaustion, hyperventilation, palpitations, nausea or sleeplessness.

- Changes to thinking patterns, including chaotic thoughts, irrationality, irritability, extreme sensitivity or bewilderment.

- Behavioural changes, including introversion, aggression, needy or clinging behaviour or loss of confidence.

- Negative coping techniques, including withdrawal, emotionality or dependence.

Coping strategies

Stress and anxiety tend to feed on themselves, particularly in couple relationships. Often there is no one cure, but interrupting the cycle by doing something different can offer possibilities for change. Holding on to the way we are managing a situation ensures that nothing will change. Taking on an experimental mindset may allow some new behaviours to be trialed. Amongst the following strategies, you will find some changes you can make to help reduce the effects of stress and anxiety in your day-to-day life.

Physical

- Regular exercise
- Yoga / meditation/relaxation techniques/massage
- Complementary therapies (but please inform your IVF Fertility Specialist of the details when you commence any such therapies)
- Sleeping (either more or less)
- Crying or laughing
**Behavioural**

- Find achievable projects at home or work which make you feel productive
- Plan with your partner to look out for each other at social events – ask how the other is feeling before you arrive and during the event
- Plan other activities to look forward to
- Review your work hours (read our brochure titled Balancing Work & IVF)
- Take breaks from treatment, even if just for a month or two
- Shorten visits to newborns, children's birthday parties, etc. (instead, deliver a cooked meal or write a letter)
- Share *doing* activities (like movies/sport) rather than talking activities with friends
- Seek out other community groups that focus on interests other than children, for example, a book club
- Educate friends and family who are interested and keen to support you
- Identify your underlying feelings, for example, anger generally masks fear/helplessness, and bitterness masks pain

**Emotional**

- Share your true feelings with your partner
- Accept that your partner may be emotionally different to you
- Discuss with your partner what helps and what doesn’t
- Adopt a “best friend” attitude to yourself, for example: accept/forgive rather than blame yourself
- Share your feelings with someone else
- Identify people who can and will hang in there with you (you may be surprised)
- See a good GP or counsellor if you are worried about persistent anxiety, depression or other symptoms

**Cognitive Intellectual**

- Remember that you and your partner may not always be on the same page regarding how you think or feel about your treatment
- Give each other as much time as you can to consider new ideas – attitude changes take time
- Accept that your feelings are inevitable when negotiating a chaotic life path
- Learn about the treatment, ask lots of questions to help you feel more in control
- Try not to place too much importance on a particular treatment cycle
- Refuse to accept unfair judgements about you or your treatment choices
- Try to visualise many varied futures, do not just focus on one – discussing a Plan B won’t reduce the chances of your Plan A working out
Some final thoughts

Remember that the vast majority of people with fertility difficulties are normal people in unusual, stressful or unexpected circumstances doing the best they can at that time. This includes your partner. Although lots of helpful change can happen through acceptance and compromise, it is more helpful to respect each other's differences rather than trying to change each other.

More Information

IVFAustralia has one of the most comprehensive specialised fertility counselling services in Australia. Counselling is available at any stage before, during and after treatment and is available at all IVFAustralia clinics in Sydney, Central Coast and Newcastle. Contact your clinic to make a counselling appointment. All consultations are completely confidential.