

Reproductive endocrinologist debunks seven common myths about IVF

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For some people, getting pregnant can be challenging. So more and more are turning to in vitro fertilization—or IVF—which offers hope for couples and individuals trying to have a baby.

But with its rise in popularity, [myths](#) have spread about IVF—including its effectiveness and safety—making it hard to know what's true.

"The best thing you can do is find a doctor and a practice you feel comfortable with," says John Rinehart, MD, a reproductive endocrinologist at Rush. "And to make sure you know the facts, especially those based on evidence."

Considering IVF? Rinehart debunks common myths.

1. Myth: IVF isn't effective

Fact: IVF can be successful.

IVF involves fertilizing an egg with sperm in a laboratory dish and then returning the resulting embryo to the uterus to create a pregnancy.

Since it started in the late 1970s, the success of IVF has only grown. Nearly 9 million babies have been conceived from the procedure. And about one in every 50 infants born in the U.S. every year are conceived using the procedure.

Rinehart adds that success rates for IVF can be as high as 90%, but it may take more than one round, depending on if there are underlying issues.

"In some areas, IVF is quite successful," he says. "It really depends on the technology, your technician and the disease itself."

2. Myth: IVF is only for female infertility

Fact: IVF is for female and [male infertility](#).

IVF is often recommended if you or your partner have a range of certain conditions, one being [infertility](#). And if you've struggled to conceive

after 12 months or more of regular sex, or six months if you're aged 35 or older, you may be facing infertility.

Rinehart says infertility is a symptom, not a cause.

"In order to know whether IVF is a good option for you and your partner, you have to have a diagnosis," he says. "And to have a diagnosis, you have to look at all the factors, both male and female."

He adds that one third of all IVF cases are due to males and about 10% to 20% are a combination of both male and female.

Infertility in men can be caused by disruption of testicular or ejaculatory function, as well as by hormonal and genetic disorders.

3. Myth: Age doesn't matter

Fact: Age is one of the biggest factors with infertility.

Research suggests that 50% of IVF procedures in women ages 35 and under resulted in a birth, while for women ages 42 and older, 3.9% of the egg transfers resulted in a birth.

Regardless if you exercise regularly and eat well, age is still the most important factor. This is because although a person may be healthy, the ovary has still gone through the aging process.

4. Myth: Stress causes infertility

Fact: Not directly.

"Going through IVF is a highly stressful event," Rinehart says. "And

while stress is not a direct cause of infertility, there's no reason why you can't treat the anxiety and help people get through this."

Rinehart adds that by treating stress, you and your partner may be willing to do more than one treatment cycle, which can improve your overall chance of getting pregnant.

One [study](#) found that men and women seeking fertility treatment who participated in talk therapy and mindfulness were more than twice as likely to get pregnant as the couples who didn't use these coping strategies.

5. Myth: IVF causes cancer

Fact: IVF does not increase the risk of cancer.

Whether it's cervical, endometrial, ovarian or breast cancer, IVF doesn't increase the risk of these diseases in women. But that doesn't mean it's not possible.

For example, about 37% of people using IVF are younger than 35. And the majority are 35 or older, with more than 20% at least 41. That means women are more likely getting infertility treatments at a time when their [breast cancer](#) risk is higher because of their age.

If you have had cancer, you may also wonder if the hormones in IVF could trigger a recurrence. But research continues to show that the short-term use of these hormones does not advance or increase your risk of developing cancer.

6. Myth: IVF causes multiple pregnancies

Fact: IVF has a low risk of multiple pregnancies.

Rinehart says twins and triplets were common in the early days of IVF due to limited information on the embryos. This led to over-transferring embryos and caused a higher chance of multiple pregnancies.

"We have more information on the embryos now, so we no longer recommend transferring more than one embryo at a time," he says. "But you can have twins with IVF, just along the same rate as if you were getting pregnant naturally, which is around 2%."

7. Myth: IVF isn't safe

Fact: IVF is a generally safe procedure.

Rinehart says IVF is relatively safe but notes that it's still a [medical procedure](#) and has its risks. This can include overstimulating the ovaries, or ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, polycystic ovarian disease, and infections and bleeding.

"The risks are fairly low," Rinehart says. "The reality is that the risk is much higher having a child than trying IVF."

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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