

Manage the stress from infertility

by Tina Smith

If you are a woman struggling with infertility, you've probably been advised to "just relax" more often than you care to hear the exasperating phrase.

Current studies exploring the link between stress factors and infertility issues are contradictory and inconclusive. Simply put, no one has been able to prove if stress causes infertility, but some experts believe it's only a matter of time before the physiological effects of stress are linked to reproduction. In fact, doctors at Shore Institute for Reproductive Medicine in New Jersey have seen stress-reduction techniques help women who had not been able to conceive finally get pregnant.

One thing is clear -- infertility definitely causes stress and takes a toll on emotions, self-esteem, physical well-being, finances and relationships. And while stress can't be avoided entirely, you can learn to manage and minimize the factors most frustrating for you. So take a deep breath and try these suggestions to help bring a sense of balance to your life:

GET IT OUT – Don't keep your thoughts and emotions bottled up. Find a safe place to unload the sadness you carry around. Allow yourself a limited amount of time to focus on your struggle with infertility. Participate in a support group or find another caring environment for candid sharing. If you are more of a loner, write down your frustrations and insights in a journal, which is always there and ready for anything.

SOAK IT IN – Treat yourself to life's simple pleasures. Make time to indulge in flowers, music, new clothes, hobbies, manicures, a trip to the movie theater, weekend getaways or other healthy distractions. Your road to success may be long, so remember to be good to yourself along the way and stoke energy and zest for the journey.

RELAX IT AWAY – Explore tangible and effective ways to take your mind off your reproductive system. Consider massage therapy, acupuncture, yoga, approved exercises, walking, deep breathing, visualization, muscle relaxation or meditation to counterbalance stressors. Find a method that fits your personality as well as your schedule and budget.

TALK IT UP – Be honest with family members and friends about what you are going through, how you cope and what you want from them. Keep the lines of communication open, and make the most of opportunities to educate those outside the infertile world. You have the power to help build empathy and understanding.

STAND TOGETHER – Bridge the gap that infertility can create between you and your spouse. A united front is more powerful than traveling the path alone. Don't assign blame. Understand and accept the different ways men and women handle situations. Be clear about your needs. Remember what you love about each other. Make a point to do things together that you both enjoy. Be affectionate and spontaneous.

SEEK HELP – If the burden of infertility seems more than you can bear or if you think you may be battling depression, make an appointment with your doctor or a professional counselor to find other options for dealing with stress.

Information and ideas for this article were taken from the American Infertility Association's "Stressed for Success" fact sheet.