

Conquering unexplained infertility

by Tina Smith

One out of every five couples with fertility challenges won't be given any medical explanation for why they can't conceive. A reproductive specialist can be a true ally in this mysterious realm of infertility, even when initial tests and procedures don't reveal any concrete answers.

For a woman, unexplained infertility usually means that you are ovulating normally and your fallopian tubes are open and healthy. You don't have pelvic adhesions or endometriosis. Your partner has a high sperm count with good motility, and the two of you have been having frequent intercourse for a year or longer.

Keep in mind that your body is a complex machine. Seemingly "normal" functions sometimes have miniscule variations that are hard to detect but may very well be affecting your fertility. For example, even open fallopian tubes can house irregular fimbria or cilia, which are the tiny finger-like projections and fine hairs that move the eggs from the ovaries and embryos into the uterus.

Eggs that are the proper maturity with the right chromosomes must be released to the right place at the right time to meet the sperm and be fertilized. If the quality of either the eggs or the sperm is poor, conception can be difficult or even impossible. When it does occur, the embryo still needs to attach to the wall of the uterus for implantation.

Your hormones may be out of balance at certain times in your menstrual cycle, you or your partner may have an infection that impedes fertility, or you may actually be conceiving but then losing your pregnancies through an early miscarriage, even without delaying your menstrual bleed. All these factors can be difficult to diagnosis, especially if conditions are intermittent.

Finding a reproductive specialist is an important step in fighting back against your unexplained infertility. Educate yourself about cutting-edge tests and approaches to targeting atypical fertility conditions, then initiate discussions with your doctor. Be sure you have the freedom to talk openly so you'll feel a part of the process.

For many couples with unexplained infertility, in vitro fertilization (IVF) is one way to eliminate a variety of conception variables – either with known or unknown fertility issues. When eggs and sperm are retrieved and combined in a laboratory outside the body, some of the steps of natural conception are eliminated or bypassed. Fertilization can be observed and confirmed. A developing embryo is evaluated for several days before being transferred to hopefully implant in the uterus and continue growing as a viable pregnancy.

Guilt over failing to conceive is a common reaction for couples with unexplained infertility, but countering that emotion with facts can help ease the burden. Just because the one thing that may be causing your infertility can't be pinpointed, be aware that effective remedies still exist. If your case is trickier to define, move forward with treatments designed to go around or correct potential problems.

Don't let an unexplained infertility diagnosis be the end of the road for you. Even though no one can offer you guarantees, couples are finding pregnancy success every month through assisted reproduction. It may be your best chance against the unknown.

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