

Pregnancy after Infertility or Miscarriage

An emotional as well as physical adjustment

By John C. Jarrett, MD

Can it really be positive? Learn how to transition from the experience of extensive treatments or disappointments and a conditioned "learning to expect nothing," to acceptance that the pregnancy is real.

After experiencing infertility it can be difficult to believe a positive pregnancy test can really be true. Initially, many couples are thrilled to hear they have finally succeeded, but quickly may be filled with fears about the preciousness of the pregnancy. It is difficult to transition from the experience of treatments that may not have worked and the conditioned learning to "expect nothing," to acceptance that the pregnancy is real.

Let Yourself Believe ... and Enjoy

If you have had previous pregnancy losses, you may be unable to accept the possibility that this time may be different. Discussions about the fear of being optimistic and believing parenting can occur is beneficial for you and your partner. Sometimes you may feel something like, "If we think it will happen then it won't," or, conversely, "if we think it won't happen then it will." This can interfere with your ability to enjoy the pregnancy experience.

Many times the fear of miscarriage can influence your decision to reveal your pregnancy to others. You and your partner may experience a wide variety of emotions ranging from frustration that your family isn't worried to disappointment in their cautious lack of excitement. Direct communication of needs and expectations to the people in your network of support is necessary so they know what to say and do.

It is not unusual to postpone shopping for maternity clothes or baby items until well into the second, or even third, trimester. Thoughts may persist that "if we don't get excited and miscarriage happens, it won't hurt as much." Ultimately this can deprive both of you the joy of the early months of pregnancy and adjustment to parenting.

If you can allow yourselves to enjoy each day of the pregnancy experience, you will create positive memories that will serve you regardless of the pregnancy outcome. The use of positive statements can help to decrease the anxiety you may be feeling. A conscious effort to challenge thoughts of "what if a miscarriage occurs" with statements of "everything is going as it should" can help to restructure any negative thinking.

Leaving the Community of Infertility

You may find that relationships established with other infertile couples are threatened with the news of pregnancy. It is important for couples to have discussions about the issues of pregnancy early in your friendship, addressing the need for honesty about conflicting feelings of joy and jealousy that may occur with pregnancy. The transition from the infertile to the fertile world can be scary. You should try to maintain as many support systems as possible.

Leaving the comfort and familiarity of the infertility practice for the obstetrician's office can also be stressful. Relationships with the infertility team are often strong and the thought of not seeing "your team" on a regular basis can cause sadness. You may feel uneasy about the "laid back" nature of the obstetrical practice. You and your partner should schedule a consultation early on with the obstetrician to discuss anxieties and the "precious nature" of the pregnancy. You may ask for increased office visits during the early months of pregnancy to

discuss anxiety and expectations of the prenatal experience. In time, as you become familiar with the various staff members your comfort should increase.

Communicate and Appreciate

Frequent discussions with your partner about the excitement and anxiety of the pregnancy can help to normalize each other's feelings. You might consider keeping a journal of the pregnancy experience to document the memories for yourselves and the future child. Allow yourself to accept invitations for baby showers and other celebrations. The benefits of allowing yourselves to believe parenting will happen is greater than any risk of "jinxing" the pregnancy.

Sometimes the fact you wanted to get pregnant so desperately will create a resistance to complain about the negative effects of pregnancy, such as morning sickness, weight gain, and stretch marks. The same hesitancy may exist when the baby is born and you feel you can't express your frustration at lack of sleep and uncertainty with parenting skills. Remember that you are human, and it is all right if you don't feel happy about every single aspect of pregnancy and parenting. Don't set unrealistic goals.

Ultimately, the previous infertility experience can create an increased appreciation for parenting due to the realization that pregnancy is not a given. Evaluation of your motivations to parent throughout the course of the infertility experience provides you and your partner with a clear understanding of why you both want children and increases your abilities to enjoy parenting more fully.

*John C. Jarrett II, M.D., is the co-author of *The Fertility Guide: A Couples Handbook for When You Want to Have a Baby (More Than Anything Else)*.*