



What to Expect When You're Not Expecting

Managing Infertility

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An Introduction to Me

I'm...

- Someone who has experienced infertility and loss
- A certified Fertility Doula
- A Counsellor in training with specialized interest in reproductive mental health





What is Infertility?

Traditional Definition: The **inability to conceive** after 12 months of regular unprotected intercourse (World Health Organization, 2025).

Expanded Definition: A disease, condition, or status characterized by any of the following:

- i. The inability to achieve a successful pregnancy based on a patient's medical, sexual, and reproductive history, age, physical findings, diagnostic testing, or any combination of those factors.
- ii. The need for medical intervention, including, but not limited to, the use of donor gametes or donor embryos in order to achieve a successful pregnancy either as an individual or with a partner.

(American Society for Reproductive Medicine, 2023)

Causes of Infertility

(Altamimi et al., 2019)



Female Factors

Female infertility can stem from **various conditions** such as ovulation disorders, tubal blockage, or hormonal imbalances that hinder the ability to conceive.

Male Factors

Male infertility often involves issues like **low sperm count** or motility problems affecting the ability to fertilize an egg, impacting overall fertility.

Combined and Unexplained

In some cases, infertility is attributed to **combined factors** from both partners or remains **unexplained** despite thorough evaluation, complicating the diagnosis and treatment approach.

Why Is It Important to Talk About Infertility?



It's more common
than you think

1/6 Couples are affected by infertility

(Kooli et al., 2023)



Rates of Infertility
are Rising

Environmental factors, social factors



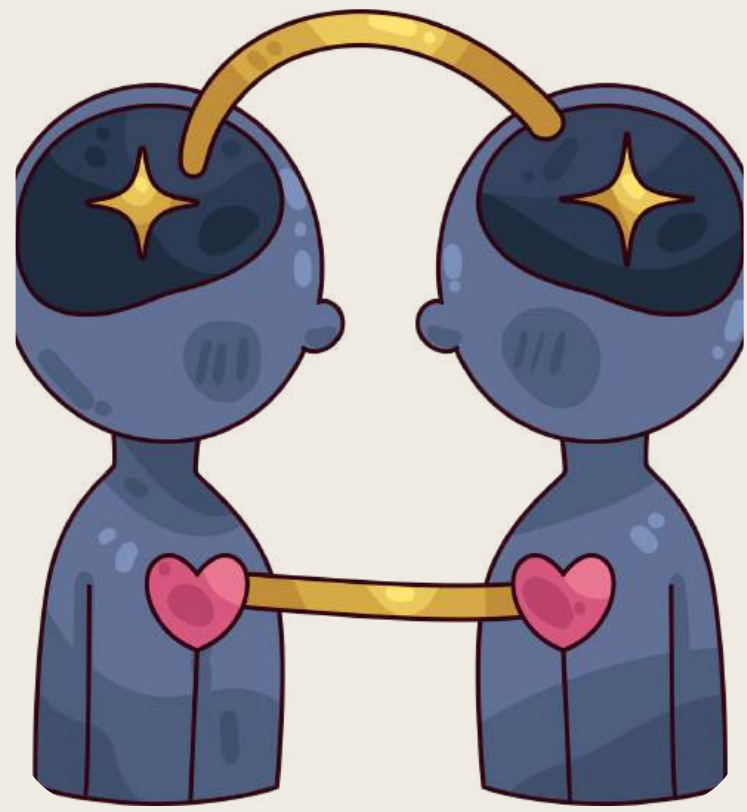
(Obeagu
et al.,
2023)



Infertility is Still Stigmatized

(Taebi et al., 2021)





Social



Bio



Psycho



Infertility Impacts Every Aspect of Life

"Infertility represents a serious **biopsychosocial** crisis" (Mitrovic, 2025).



Mental and Emotional Challenges

Grief



Loss



Many individuals experiencing infertility will at some point during their journeys experience some form of loss, whether this is miscarriage, stillbirth, embryo loss, or other forms.

(Jones et al., 2023)

Someone With Infertility Might Also Be Grieving...

- The journey to parenthood they thought they would have
- The self that they were before infertility
- Their identity as a parent
- Dreams and hopes for the future
- Relationships with friends and family (more on this later!)
- The view they had of the world before infertility

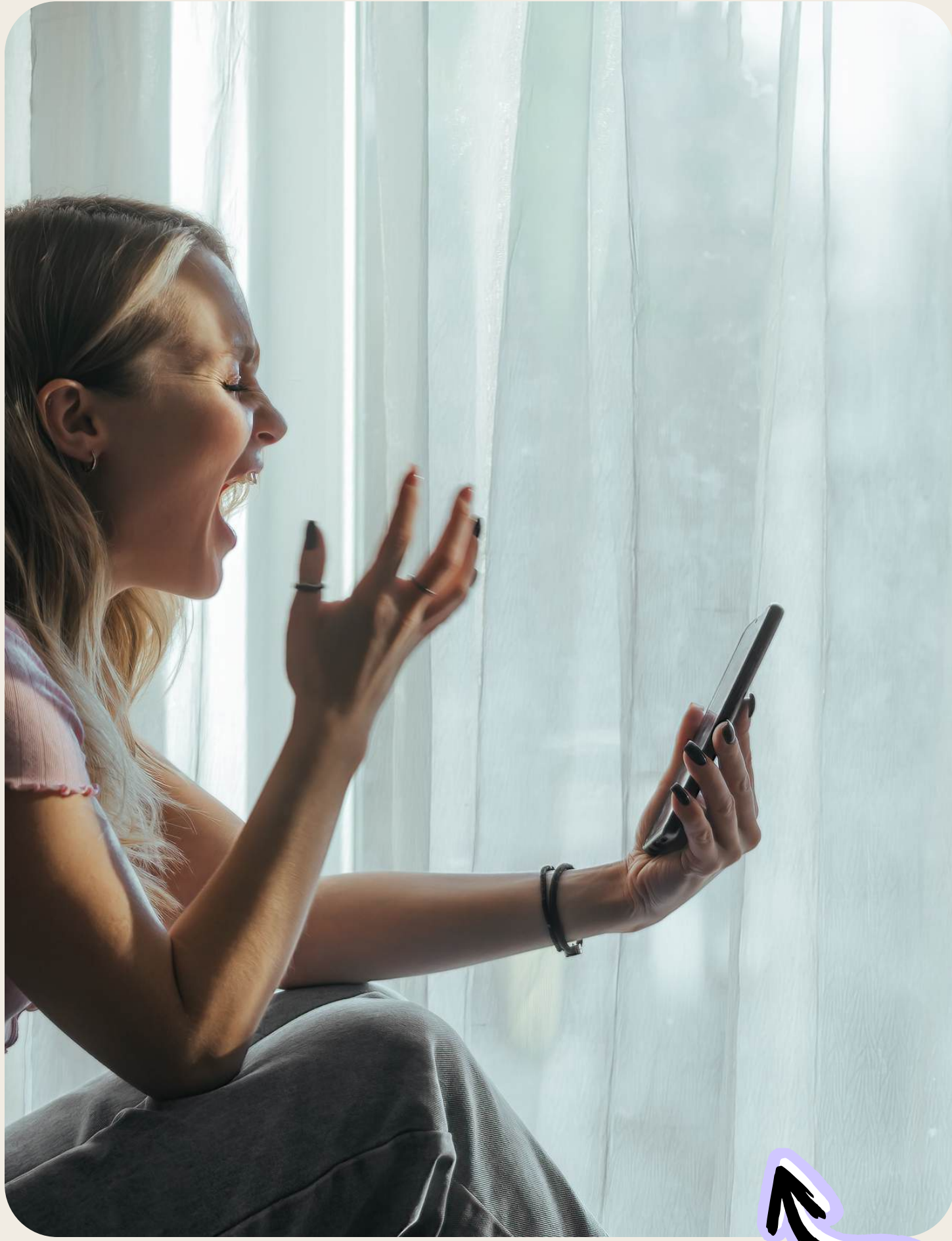
(Assaysh-Öberg et al., 2023)

Infertility as a Form of Disenfranchised Grief

A form of loss that often does not receive social recognition.

This plays out at both interpersonal and structural levels.

(McBain et al., 2019)



Anger

Being angry about infertility is completely legitimate, and can help prompt action (Archer et al., 2019; Subramandi et al., 2019)

Anger is also sometimes a protective emotion, shielding us from other feelings we are not ready to name or confront yet, including

- Jealousy (Sivri, 2024)
- Betrayal (Zou et al., 2025)
- Gender Identity Issues (Bell, 2019)
- Cultural Identity Issues (Toluk, 2025)
- **Shame** (Lee et al., 2025)



Most Common Emotional Reactions to Infertility

(El Kissi et al., 2013, as cited in Hegyi et al., 2019)

Anxiety

Infertility is basically a high stakes game of chicken full of a lot of unknowns. It's almost impossible not to experience anxiety.



Depression/Depressive Symptoms

Lowered mood, decreased motivation, loss of pleasure and joy in previously beloved activities are common for those experiencing infertility.



Just FYI...

You are not infertile because you are anxious or depressed. You are potentially anxious or depressed because you are struggling with infertility.

(Gdańska et al., 2017)





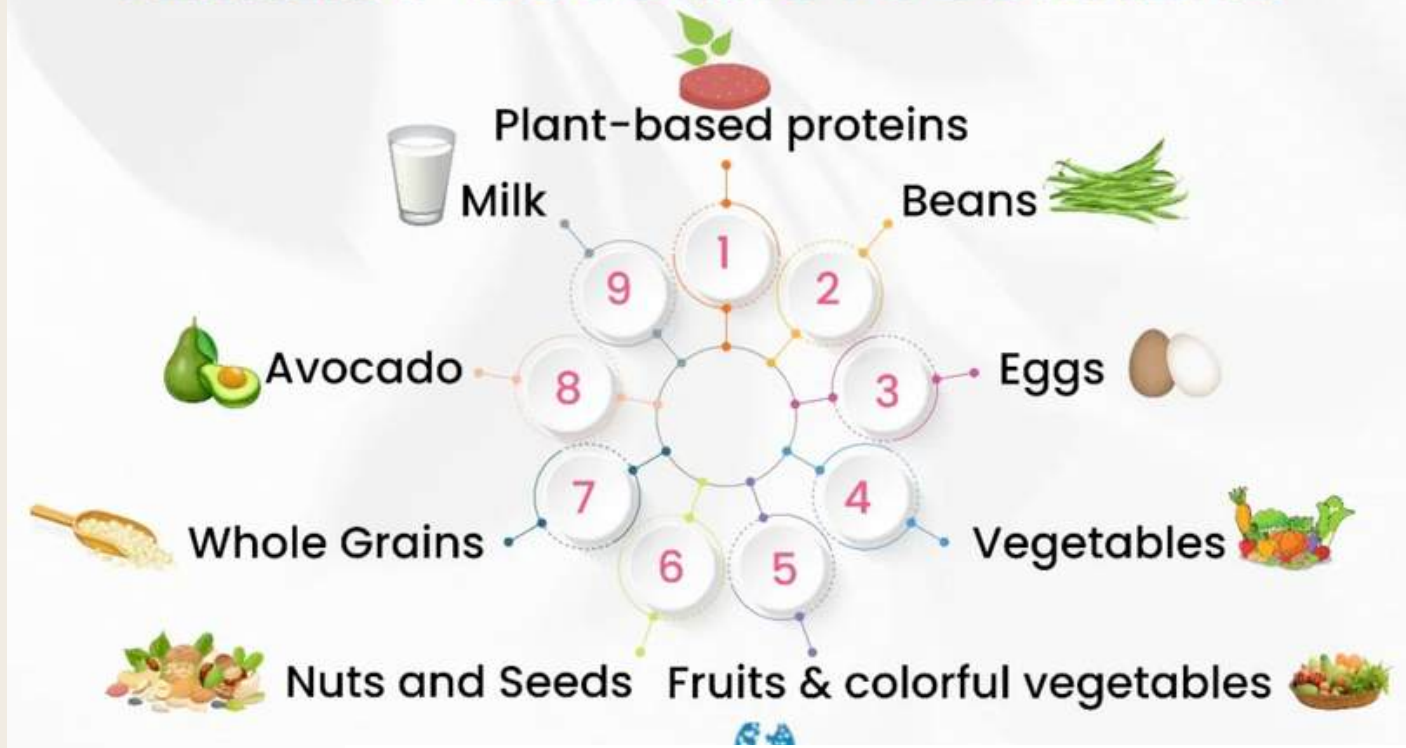
Physical Challenges

Fertility Treatments are Hard on the Body



It's easy to get overwhelmed with potential lifestyle changes

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How **Exercise** Influences **Egg Quality** and Overall Fertility





Relational Challenges

Challenges for Couples



Stress

The stress of living with infertility has been found to be comparable to living with heart disease, cancer, or HIV (Corley-Newman & Trimble, 2017)

Especially if a couple does not have strong coping mechanisms, infertility can place substantial strain on the relationship.



Intimacy

Intimacy can become dictated by factors other than desire and connection (Luk et al., 2019). Even the very concept of consent becomes complicated in the context of infertility.

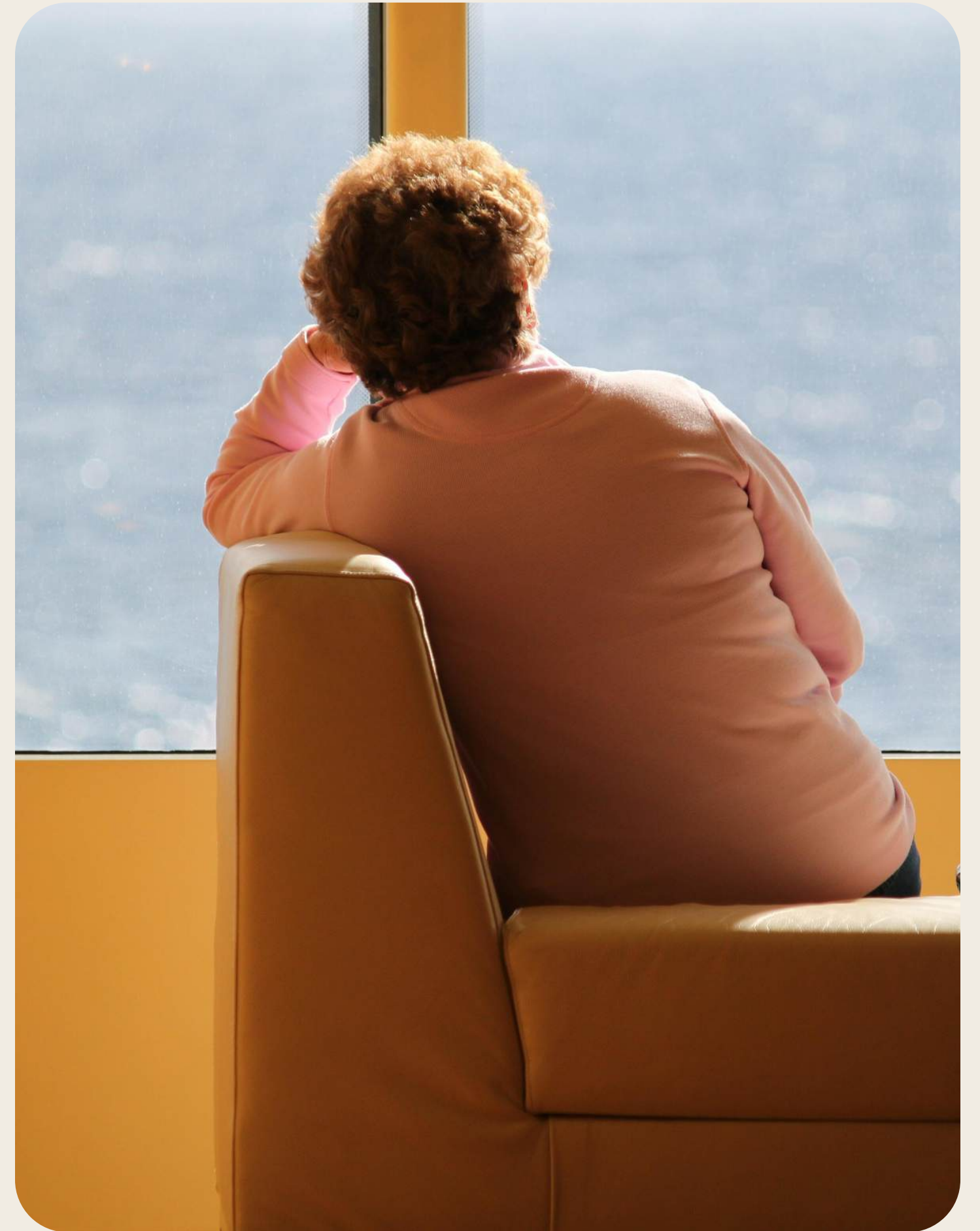


Labour Inequality

The work involved in infertility is immense, and can often fall exclusively or primarily on one partner. This can produce resentment, disconnection, and frustration.

Impact on Other Relationships

Infertility is often a lonely experience, with a negative impact on bonds with family and friends.





Men and Infertility

Impact on Men



Gender Identity



Infertility can make men feel less masculine, as if they have failed at what it means or looks like to be a man. These feelings can be particularly intense around conversations about donor gametes and/or adoption (Arya et al., 2016)

Repressed Feelings

Gender norms often dictate that men are supposed to be strong and supportive. This means that men are more likely to repress their own emotional reactions to infertility (Halcomb, 2018).

Erasure

Many men have reported feeling left out of conversations about infertility by partners, care providers, and community supports (Schick et al., 2016)

Coping with Infertility

Staying safe, sane, and well-connected during the process



Coping With and Re-Enfranchising Grief



Acknowledge Loss

Do this without minimizing, comparing.

It's the difference between "Well, it was only the first trimester" to "This hurts. I'm devastated."

Create Personalized Rituals

Mark significant personal dates

Plant a tree

Observe meaningful dates in the community (ex. National Infertility Awareness Week, International Wave of Light)

Express and Externalize

Talk with other safe people (McBain et al., 2019)

Expressive outlets (journaling, art) (Liu et al., 2024)

Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2023)

Shame says: “I’ll never get pregnant because my BMI is too high”



Self-Kindness

“I’ve been working really hard to improve my relationship with food and movement. I also still deserve to have both nourishment and joy on this journey.”

Common Humanity

“A lot of people struggle with infertility. I am not alone. BMI is also influenced by a range of factors, and many people struggle to make lasting, sustained change in this area.”

Mindfulness

“It is so painful to not have been able to grow my family yet. It hurts. I don’t know what the future holds.”

Shame and Self-Compassion

The most important antidotes to shame are empathy and self-compassion.



Research has also found that self-compassion plays a crucial mediating role between the need for parenthood and subjective well-being.

Shame and Self-Compassion

 Self-Compassion
Institute
WITH DR. KRISTIN NEFF

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Self-Compassion and Lifestyle Changes

**Take Small
Steps**



Nurturing Safe Connections



Boundaries

Your boundaries should be unique to your situation and your comfort. But a few areas people often feel they need permission to set boundaries in:

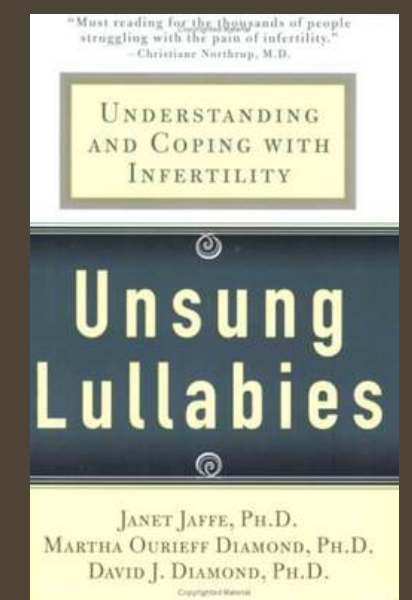
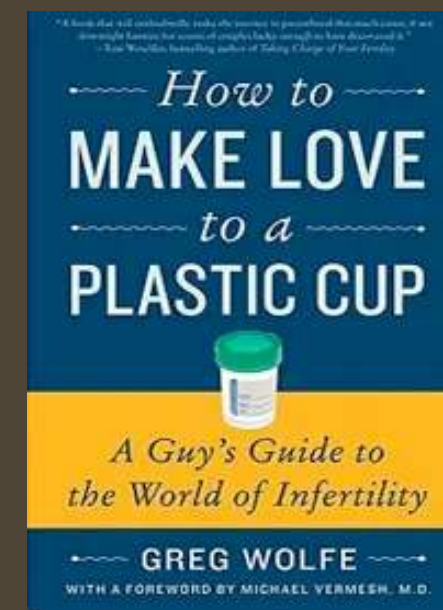
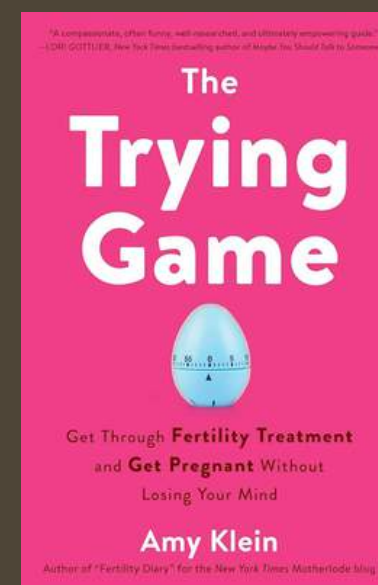
1. Experiencing infertility does not mean you give up your right to privacy
2. Taking space from friends or family who are pregnant or have children, or from child-centered holidays
3. If you're aware of a family member or friend going through infertility, don't surprise them with pregnant announcements.

(Hortsman & Morrison, 2021)



Finding Support and Connection

- Support groups and communities can be found, both online and in-person
- Counselling
 - In-house supports are available through some clinics
- Reading/resources on the topic of infertility



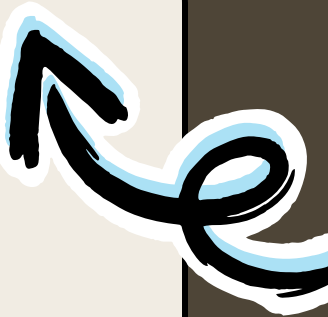
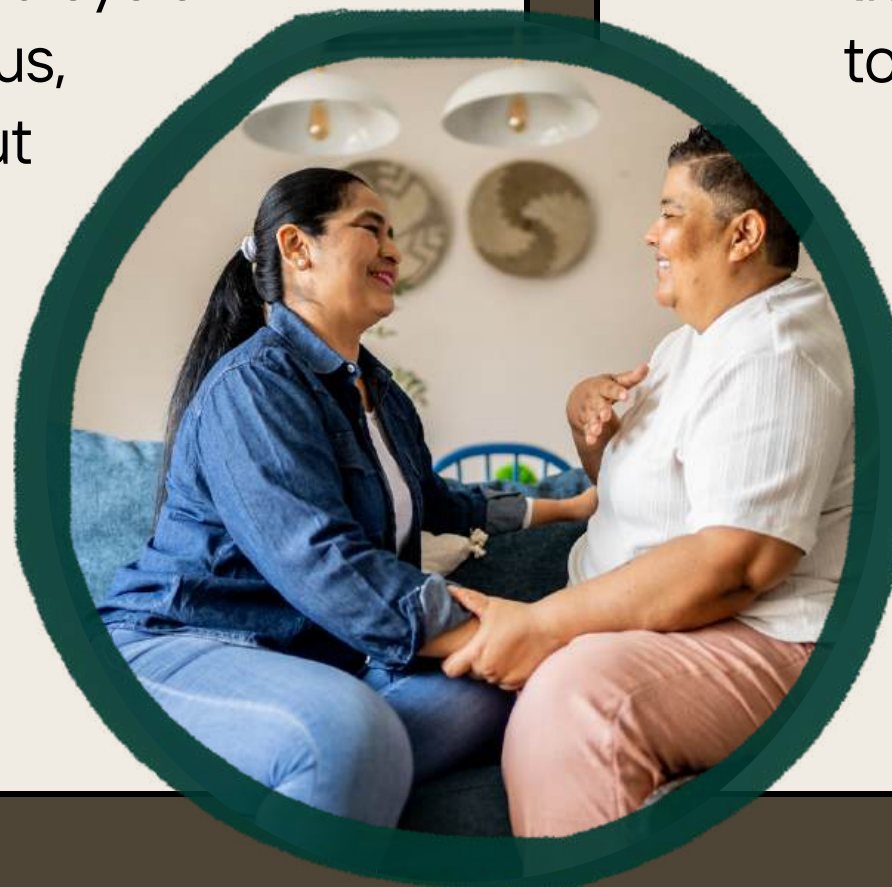
Nurturing Partnerships

Talk About It

Make space and time at less charged moments (i.e. not right after learning a cycle has been unsuccessful) to have curious, nonjudgemental conversations about fertility and the future.

...But Don't *Only* Talk About It

Find moments to connect with one another that have nothing to do with your attempts to grow your family.



Advocacy



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About Us

Fertility Alberta Advocacy & Outreach Association is the voice of fertility patients in Alberta. A patient-led nonprofit, Fertility Alberta aims to break down barriers to improve access and outcomes for all Albertans who require fertility care to build their families.

We do this by:

- [engaging patients](#)
- collaborating with [stakeholders](#)
- educating and lobbying [government officials](#)
- advocating for better fertility and family benefits with [employers](#)
- increasing [public awareness](#) of fertility issues.

Next Steps

Your Journey Is Yours

Infertility is a highly personal experience full of nuance and contradictions. You're not doing it wrong just because your journey might look different from someone else's.



Thank You

Want the full list of references used in this presentation, or some suggestions for non-academic reading material? Want to book a counselling session with me?

Reach Out!

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@choicefertilityyeg (Instagram)

The fertility community is the worst team to be on but we have the best members in the world. Thanks for being part of the team tonight. I welcome any of your questions or comments!



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