

Single Motherhood by Choice

By Lisa Schuman, LCSW and Alan B. Copperman, MD

Motherhood is a challenging and wonderful time in a woman's life, regardless of whether she is single or part of a couple. While trying to conceive as a single woman can be viewed as difficult, it can also be an exciting and empowering time. Women who embark on single motherhood by choice are similar to those who are part of a couple and choose motherhood. They are simply ready to be mothers. Single mothers by choice are willing and ready to make sacrifices of time, energy and money to parent.

Single women who desire motherhood are often anxious about even approaching their gynecologist or fertility specialist. In this day and age, however, there is no need for worry or anxiety. Tens of thousands of women become single moms by choice every year. Rather than “medicalize” or turn the process into an “infertility” process, it is important that single women desiring motherhood follow the same steps as every other woman trying to get pregnant. Basic pre-conceptual counseling steps such as taking prenatal vitamins, having genetic testing, and being in good physical condition are all important. While a single woman can indeed require fertility treatment, often conceiving is as simple as ordering sperm from a licensed sperm bank and having the processed specimen inserted into the uterus in a quick office procedure called an intrauterine insemination (IUI).



It is important that a woman have realistic expectations regarding the likelihood of conception. Whether trying naturally to conceive or via insemination of frozen and thawed donor sperm, there is only a 20% or so chance of conception each month. If a woman is over the age of 40, the chances fall by approximately half. Baseline hormone testing can be done to make sure that the eggs are of adequate quality, and depending upon a woman's history, an x-ray called a hysterosalpingogram can be performed to see if the fallopian tubes are open. If success does not soon occur, there are times that fertility medications could be added to the regimen, or in some cases, even more advanced treatments such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) can be used. Regardless of what treatment is needed, the end result is often so worthwhile. It is important that women who are trying to conceive seek and receive additional support from friends, family and loved ones. The process of getting pregnant is often filled with ups and downs, and when the treatment is successful, many new wonderful and yet exhausting challenges are soon ahead. Support can also come from professionals, including social workers and psychologists as well as support groups such as Single Mothers by Choice (www.singlemothersbychoice.org).

The question of sperm choice is personal. When a woman chooses a partner with whom she wants to share her life, she rarely questions his genetics. However, as a single person, individuals often wonder whether they should feel a “connection” with the donor profile or use the sperm of a close friend to make the experience more intimate. It makes sense that any woman would want to create a wonderful story for her family. However, it is often best to be practical. In fact, most states prohibit or limit the use of unquarantined donor sperm, and instead, recommend that the donor sperm come from a licensed sperm bank. This should dramatically increase the likelihood that genetic screening will have been completed and significant medical history ruled out. While insemination with known donors can occasionally occur, these situations are often fraught with difficulties. Unanticipated issues within the family dynamics and even legal battles between friends are not unusual. Further, a known donor must quarantine sperm for six months and a known donor may have medical issues that can prolong treatment. Consultation with legal and mental health professionals that specializes in this area can help minimize some of these potential issues.

Single mothers in the United States are more than 11 million strong and steadily growing. There have been movies made and articles written that have helped single mothers feel seen and acknowledged. The concept of “family” in the U.S. is continually changing, which has also helped single mothers feel less isolated and better understood. These changes have been positive but the most important aspect of single motherhood has always been the same, the desire to care for, nurture and love a child.

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Reproductive Medicine Associates of New York (RMA of New York) is a world-renowned, full-service fertility center, specializing in In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), Intrauterine Insemination (IUI), Egg Donation, Egg Freezing (Oocyte Cryopreservation), Urology and other reproductive health services, with three New York locations in Manhattan, Westchester and Long Island. www.rmany.com