

Plan for likely difficult times (on receipt of possible unpleasant news, when expectations are not met or during the waiting period.)

Plan weekends away, special times with your partner, by yourself or with a good friend.

Self appreciation list – Write down all the ways you can think of to be good to yourself – things that are just for your pleasure and well-being. Work through this list particularly during difficult times. At these times it helps to take life day by day, to stay with the day and plan each day if necessary.

Develop powerful thoughts which aide you e.g. "This too will pass", "no matter what happens I will be OK".

Ask your 'wiser self' for guidance or think of the advice you would give to a friend in your situation.

Remember support is the primary factor in developing resilience through difficult times.



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Tips for
women

Understand that difficulty conceiving often promotes a state of in-limbo sustained grief.

Understand that treatment can take you on an emotional roller-coaster ride (short or long term) through great hope, expectations and possible disappointment.

Understand the balancing act:

The need to allow yourself to periodically acknowledge and express that grief at some times while at other times putting energy into distractions, nurturing yourself and your life.

This is *necessary* to maintain mental and emotional wellbeing while you are waiting to have a baby, to maintain treatment programs or waiting to make decisions about your fertility and your life.

Understand the Common challenges for women:

- Dealing with strong emotions of loss, sadness, frustration, envy, and fears
- Feeling isolated, alone in grief and a need for support and understanding
- Feeling others do not understand the situation
- Dealing with the often unintentional insensitivities of others
- Dealing with the news of other people's pregnancies
- Working through who to confide in and how much to say to others
- Juggling work and the treatment regime
- Being patient: waiting and more waiting – for appointments, treatment, test results, pregnancy outcomes
- Acknowledging a lack of control over invasive treatments, medication and outcomes
- Finding one's life is on hold – affecting career, leisure activities, lifestyle choices and finances

- Dealing with special occasions e.g. Mother's Day and Christmas
- Managing the two week waiting period from the embryo transfer to the pregnancy outcome, reportedly the most anxious time
- Some women experience irritability and mood changes while on medication and this can be a hormonal reaction – not a sign of not coping.



Given these extra drains on your energy it helps if you (periodically and as early as possible) top your energy levels up and nurture yourself by:

Being gentle on yourself and giving yourself priority when you are feeling particularly vulnerable. Maybe give a present instead of going to that children's party or stay for one hour instead of three!

Express grief – talk to others, cry, engage in low impact exercise or keep a diary for intimate thoughts and feelings. Understand that you are grieving – not going crazy.

Maintain good basic self care – a nutritious diet, adequate sleep and exercise helps reduce stress and maintain a positive attitude towards yourself.

Minimise other stresses while you are on treatment and plan ahead and organize activities to look forward to during treatment

Create a circle of support – friends, family, support groups, counsellors, supporting internet websites and books. Decide who you can trust to confide in. Rehearse difficult conversations to help with difficult situations at work, with family, friends etc. Have some stock phrases to give to invasive questions about "having children". Be prepared to be an educator of others who may be unaware but well-meaning.

Be realistically hopeful – Know that being positive and hopeful is not always possible especially after sad news. This is a time of grief. Being positive is not a necessary condition for pregnancy to occur. Therefore do not stress or blame yourself if at times you are not as 'positive' as you would like to be. Being realistically hopeful helps you most survive treatment.

Distractions – It helps if you can find something else meaningful to think about other than the infertility and treatment. This gives your mind a needed break. People undergoing fertility treatment frequently turn to hobbies, study, work, humour, meditation, yoga, calming breathing exercises, relaxation exercises, or massage to nurture, restore and quiet the mind and body.

Resist early on and find small ways how not to have your total life on hold. Usually people can work towards achieving their goals, but because infertility is not totally under your control, putting all your life energy into it is dangerous. If it takes a long time to conceive, you can find yourself not only 'not pregnant' but also with nothing else in your life to sustain you. See if you can find other things you can control to compensate for loss of control.