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Successful IVF treatment means having a single, healthy baby

The aim of all fertility treatment should be the birth of a healthy baby with minimum risks for the mother. For many women, this can be achieved by transferring one embryo and for this reason you may be advised to have a single embryo replaced. The clinic staff will assess your suitability for this based on your age, whether you have had any previous IVF cycles and on the quality of your embryos. Each case is assessed individually as staff at your clinic will want to ensure you have the best chance of having a successful pregnancy and a healthy baby.

Twins or triplets may appear to be the ideal outcome when you are going through fertility treatment, but multiple pregnancy is the biggest health risk for IVF babies. One in every twelve twin pregnancies results in at least one baby dying or having a significant disability. Single embryo transfer will dramatically reduce the risk of this happening to you.

It is sometimes thought that single embryo transfer might reduce the chances of success; in fact replacing two embryos does not double your chances of success, but it does increase your chances of a multiple pregnancy with all the additional risks this brings. To ensure you are given the best advice, the embryologist will assess the quality of your embryos prior to the transfer. The best quality embryo will be replaced and any further good quality embryos may be frozen and stored for you for future use.

Addressing the myths about single embryo transfer

The following are some common misunderstandings about single embryo transfer and what is involved:-

I'm fit and healthy, and therefore willing to take the risk of having twins

Being fit and healthy does not mean that you will avoid complications with a multiple pregnancy, most of which are related to the babies being born prematurely. No one wants to risk damage to their own child if it can be avoided.

I know lots of twins who are fine and I think the risks are being exaggerated

Many twins are, but sadly many others are not. If you conceive naturally, only 1 in 80 pregnancies are multiple, but if you conceive after IVF treatment, 1 in 6 pregnancies are multiple. This means the risks of problem pregnancies, of miscarriage, of disability and of death are unacceptably high. It is quite possible to reduce the multiple birth rate while giving a very good chance of a live healthy baby.

Why are IVF patients offered single embryo transfer?

Single embryo transfer will give many people the best chance of achieving a successful, healthy pregnancy, but is not recommended for all IVF patients. The decision should always be taken on an individual basis. A good clinic where patients are assessed individually for their suitability will have good success rates with single embryo transfer.

It's not about saving money on caring for premature babies - it's about saving lives. Babies are only admitted to specialist neonatal care units because they have serious complications. Half of all twins are born prematurely and are of low birth weight, which means they are more likely to need specialist medical help. Premature babies may require intensive neonatal care as there are risks of brain damage through lack of oxygen or bleeding into the brain and the long term outcomes of this may be epilepsy, cerebral palsy and significant learning disability. Single embryo transfer is about increasing the numbers of healthy IVF babies.

I'd rather have twins than no baby at all

The quality of your embryos will influence your chances of getting pregnant. Anyone who gets pregnant with twins would have got pregnant with a single embryo transfer. Your clinic will discuss single embryo transfer with you and will be able to recommend the best course of action based on your individual situation.

During your treatment, there are some questions you may want to ask the clinic staff:-

- ▶ What is your multiple birth rate?
- ▶ How do you decide who is suitable for single embryo transfer?
 - ▶ What would you recommend for me and why?
 - ▶ What are your success rates from single embryo transfer?
- ▶ Will you be able to tell me about the quality of my embryos?
 - ▶ Will I be able to freeze any spare embryos I don't use in my treatment?
- ▶ What happens if I don't agree with your recommendation?
 - ▶ When will the final decision be made?

For detailed information about the risks to mothers and babies of a multiple pregnancy see: www.oneatatime.org.uk

For more information about multiple pregnancy and birth, see: www.multiplebirths.org.uk

This factsheet is produced by Fertility Network UK, in conjunction with One at a Time and the Multiple Births Foundation.



INFOLINE
01424 732361

www.fertilitynetworkuk.org