Monash IVF

Egg Freezing for Elective Reasons.

(Oocyte Cryopreservation)

Taking control of your fertility by choosing to freeze your eggs is a popular option for people choosing to delay parenthood. Female fertility declines with age, particularly from your mid to late 30s. Notably, the quality of your eggs declines as you age. Egg quality is a major factor in a successful pregnancy and a healthy baby. Choosing to freeze your eggs when you are younger and the quality of your eggs is better, gives your future self a greater chance at starting a family when the time is right for you.

The egg freezing process:

Step 1: Appointment with a fertility specialist

When you see one of our experienced fertility specialists, they'll undertake some initial testing to determine whether egg freezing is the best option for you. These tests may include a pelvic ultrasound or a blood test to measure the levels of Antimuellarian Hormone (AMH) in your blood. AMH is an indicator of the number of eggs that remain in your ovaries.

Once you have made an informed decision about egg freezing, your specialist will tailor a treatment plan to your individual needs.

Step 2: Stimulation

During every monthly cycle, eggs grow in fluid-filled sacs (called follicles) on the ovaries. Only one egg will mature and be released through ovulation. The rest will be naturally reabsorbed. The egg freezing process - as with an IVF cycle - helps more eggs to mature.

To do this, you'll take hormone medication for eight to 14 days to help stimulate your ovaries. Your fertility specialist will discuss the best medications and stimulation techniques for you. This medication usually takes the form of hormone injections using a tiny needle under the skin.

The idea of injecting yourself can feel daunting at first - we completely understand this. That's why your fertility nurse will take you through the process step-by-step, showing you exactly how and where to give the injections. During the stimulation period, you'll be monitored via blood tests and ultrasounds.

Step 3: Egg collection

When your eggs are ready to be collected, you'll visit the hospital for a short procedure. You'll be asleep, so you won't feel a thing. The procedure itself only takes around 10-15 minutes. Afterwards, you'll wake up in recovery, where we'll keep you warm and comfortable. You can usually go home an hour or two later.

During the procedure, your fertility specialist extracts the fluid from the follicles on your ovaries (where the eggs grow). The eggs are extracted vaginally, so there are no cuts or scars.

As with any anaesthetic, you might feel tired or groggy afterwards. Bring a support person along as you won't be able to drive after this procedure.

Step 4: Egg freezing

Once your eggs have been collected, your fertility specialist and theatre team passes them directly to our scientists. These skilled scientists recover the eggs and identify the mature eggs to be frozen. We only freeze mature eggs - immature eggs are not viable or ready to create embryos.

Your eggs are frozen in the lab using a method called vitrification, or snap freezing. We decrease the water content in the eggs to prevent damage to them when they're frozen.

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Costs

In Australia, Medicare provides a rebate for fertility treatments if there is a medical need for the treatment. If you're freezing your eggs for medical reasons, you'll receive a rebate from Medicare that will reduce the out-of-pocket cost. If there is no medical need for you to freeze your eggs, then your treatment will not be covered by Medicare, and you will be required to pay the full out-of-pocket cost.

For many people that come to us for egg freezing, it is the first time they have had their fertility investigated. Often during the initial testing, our doctors discover underlying medical conditions which may impact fertility, meaning that freezing eggs is for a medical reason, not an elective one. When this happens, you would be eligible for a Medicare rebate. We recommend that you see a fertility specialist to determine whether your egg freezing would be for medical or elective reasons. Note: Monash IVF is not responsible for future cost changes that result from legislative or Medicare decisions.

The costs that are associated with egg freezing for elective reasons include:

- Monash IVF fee
- Cost of medications
- Hospital and anaesthetic fee
- Ongoing egg storage fee

Egg freezing costs differ between clinics and states, so it is best that you speak to our enquiry team for the most up-to-date costs relevant to your circumstances.

Common questions

How long can my eggs be frozen for?

Scientifically, there's no time limit on how long eggs can stay frozen. But the time can vary depending on each state's legislation which may impose statutory storage limits. The great news is our team can help you with determining your state's time limit for storage and can help with extensions of storage if needed. Rest assured we are here for you long term.

What does the freezing process of eggs involve?

Once the eggs have been collected and our scientists have determined which eggs are mature, your eggs are frozen. Mature eggs are frozen by first exposing them to a cryoprotective solution and then freezing very rapidly using a process called vitrification. Each egg is individually frozen and stored.

What does the thawing process of frozen eggs involve?

When you decide to use your frozen eggs to try for a pregnancy, our team of scientists will thaw your eggs to create embryos with your chosen source of sperm (be it donor sperm, or the sperm of a partner). Thawing involves the quick warming of the frozen eggs to 37oC and the removal of the cryoprotective solution. After a short period of recovery, the eggs are then suitable for insemination, usually by injecting a single sperm into the egg. After fertilization, embryo culture is performed using standard procedures. You will then be able to undergo an embryo transfer.

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How successful is egg freezing?

The success of egg freezing is based on the number and quality of the eggs harvested, and that in turn is heavily dependent on your age. Every body is different and responds differently to treatment, so the number and quality of eggs harvested will vary. Consequently, to obtain sufficient eggs for a good chance of pregnancy using frozen eggs, you may need to undergo multiple egg collections.

Egg freezing was deemed to be a non-experimental procedure in Australia in 2012, so success rates of pregnancy from frozen eggs are limited. Many people fall pregnant naturally without the use of their frozen eggs, or they decide not to use their frozen eggs for other reasons. There are thousands of people with frozen eggs in storage that are ready to be used when they're ready.

Recent international research has indicated that, on a per thawed oocyte basis, the use of frozen eggs has the potential to give similar pregnancy results as using freshly collected eggs. Published results suggest a single pregnancy may be produced on average from about 10 -15 eggs.

The number and quality of eggs collected and the overall success rate for the procedure depends on the woman's age, the reason for the treatment and other factors. There are instances where no eggs may be collected or suitable for freezing despite everyone's best efforts.

What are the risks associated with egg freezing?

You may have heard egg freezing referred to as an 'insurance policy for your fertility' – but sometimes frozen eggs do not result in a successful pregnancy, and sometimes we are unable to collect any eggs suitable for freezing. Like any procedure, there are risks associated with egg freezing. It is important that you are educated about these risks before starting treatment. Some of the risks associated with egg freezing include:

- No eggs maybe collected.
- The failure of frozen eggs to survive the freeze/thaw process.
- The failure of thawed eggs to fertilise after insemination.
- The failure of fertilised eggs to develop.
- The embryos formed may not be suitable for transfer.
- The embryos that are transferred may not result in a pregnancy.
- Failure of an established pregnancy to result in a live birth.

When you see a fertility specialist, they can explain the risks of egg freezing to you in more detail.

It important to emphasize that natural conception is best for potentially fertile women as any assisted reproductive treatment (ART) technique can carry an element of risk and overall success rates may be lower than natural conception. All ART involves invasive medical procedures and should only be used when necessary, and after proper consideration of the risks and benefits.

If I freeze my eggs, am I guaranteed a pregnancy when I choose to use them later on?

The storage of frozen eggs by presumably fertility people does not guarantee a subsequent pregnancy, irrespective of the number of eggs frozen. It must be emphasized that assisted reproductive treatment is not always successful. The Monash IVF team work incredibly hard to achieve the best possible outcomes for our patients, however, it may eventuate that you are unable to fall pregnant using your frozen eggs.

What is the upper age limit of egg freezing at Monash IVF?

Egg freezing for elective reasons at Monash IVF is restricted to people under 45 years-of-age. People considering this treatment aged between 40-45 should be aware that the pregnancy outcomes are significantly lower and there is very little information regarding the viability of this technology for these older eggs. Monash IVF will not participate in the creation of embryos from cryopreserved eggs after the woman's 53rd birthday. This is based on the socially responsible view that embryos should not be created by women who are past the age of natural menopause.

Can egg freezing impact the health of future children conceived using frozen eggs?

Egg freezing using the vitrification technique has been around for many years and there have been thousands of babies conceived world-wide using this technique. To date there have been no reports of adverse obstetric or perinatal outcomes. However, this remains a relatively recent technique and we will continue to closely monitor our results and those from overseas.