

The Benefits of Counseling for Infertility Patients

Quick Tips:

- The infertility process can cause a great amount of stress
- Dealing with infertility can lead to battles with depression and anxiety
- Counseling can take the form of individual, couples, or group support
- Counseling can help you feel less alone and provide an outlet for coping

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Infertility is one of the most stressful life crises that a couple can face. Among the top issues that contribute to the stress, for couples in the throes of infertility, are physical tests and procedures, relationship challenges, financial issues, emotional issues, decision making, hormone treatments, and exhaustion. Researchers have shown that infertility and stress are related to each other and even though no hard evidence has been established as to whether stress causes infertility or infertility causes stress, it is well known that the infertility process can be overwhelming. The exhausting nature of infertility treatments and related issues can lead to battles with depression and anxiety. This can affect the way in which one copes throughout the process. However, help is available in the form of counseling.

Counseling can be beneficial for those struggling with infertility. Counseling can take the form of individual, couples, or group support. Within a counseling relationship individuals can talk about what is important to them in an effort to gain some understanding which may bring clarity and perspective to their personal circumstances. Individuals can explore and learn constructive ways of coping with infertility, a situation that is often beyond the realm of control but one that can effectively be managed. Through individual counseling, resilience can be nurtured as a counselor can often help a struggling client to identify the strengths he or she already possesses that aid in coping, but may not be apparent to an individual. The same benefits apply for couples who enter counseling relationships. Counselors can help couples begin to explore options for infertility treatments and family building, as well as, address relationship issues. Counselors can help with the treatment of depression and anxiety, managing stress, and enhancing coping skills in order for individuals and couples to feel more powerful and in control of their infertility process and their lives. Group counseling and support groups can also be beneficial as individuals and couples tend to feel less isolated while in the midst of infertility as they are able to gain support from others enduring similar situations. Since lack of social support can be a major issue for infertile persons, support groups and group therapy can serve to increase social support which is a major contributing factor in increased ability to cope. In all types of infertility counseling, there is comfort in knowing you are not alone and that you have an outlet for coping with infertility issues. If you or your partner feel that you are having difficulty coping with infertility, counseling may be a beneficial option for you.

- Watch for signs that indicate you may benefit from counseling
- Know that if you are struggling, help is available
- Physical and emotional signs of exhaustion are common among infertility patients
- Seek counseling if you consistently struggle with signs of stress and decreased ability to cope

FOLLOWING ARE SIGNS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE THAT MAY INDICATE AN INDIVIDUAL OR COUPLE WOULD BENEFIT FROM COUNSELING:

- ✦ Loss of interest in usual activities
- ✦ Depression that doesn't lift
- ✦ Strained interpersonal relationships
- ✦ Difficulty thinking of anything other than infertility
- ✦ High levels of anxiety
- ✦ Diminished ability to accomplish tasks
- ✦ Difficulty concentrating
- ✦ Change in sleep patterns
- ✦ Change in appetite or weight
- ✦ Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- ✦ Thoughts about death or suicide
- ✦ Social isolation
- ✦ Persistent feelings of pessimism, guilt, or worthlessness
- ✦ Persistent feelings of bitterness or anger you need in order to mourn your loss.

If you or your partner are experiencing any of the above signs during your struggle with infertility, know that help is available. Counselors specializing in the treatment of issues related to infertility work with individuals, couples, and groups to help them to cope more effectively with infertility treatment and the issues that often accompany infertility. Know that the above signs can be common to individuals and couples struggling with infertility as treatment is often long-standing and can be mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausting. Whether you have recently developed these signs or have been consistently struggling with them, a counselor can help.

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