

# Coping with the Emotional Side of Male Factor Infertility

## Quick Tips:

- All feelings you experience are normal and it is okay to express them.
- Talking with your partner may allow you to discover you each experience similar emotions
- Educate yourself about infertility and know what to expect in order to eliminate “out of control” feelings

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*Few resources are available for men coping with male factor infertility as, traditionally, research has focused on infertility issues related to women. Even though men do struggle with similar emotions as women, they experience many new and genuine feelings that are unique. Unfortunately, due to traditional stereotypes of men as the strong, masculine, and sexually adequate gender; men experiencing male factor infertility tend to suffer in silence as the male ego feels attacked. Common emotions experienced by men include anger and blame which occur as a result of men stifling their emotions. Men experience guilt as they see themselves as failing their partners. Add to this the embarrassment and humiliation men may feel as they are asked to undergo probing tests and procedures. As a result of male factor infertility, men who are usually seen as in control now feel powerless, inadequate, and out of control. Therefore, men sometimes avoid emotions by overcompensating and throwing themselves into work or other activities, blaming others out of anger, or commonly shutting down their emotional selves. All of these emotions can be confusing for men struggling with male factor infertility.*

FOLLOWING ARE SOME HEALTHY WAYS FOR MEN TO COPE WITH EMOTIONS DURING INFERTILITY:

**Recognize that feelings are normal.** Feelings arise from the very primitive parts of our brain which are innate to humans. Feelings are just that; feelings. We don't have control over what we feel. Therefore, emotions don't categorize us as weak or strong, bad or good, masculine or feminine. The reaction to feelings is what we can control and males often react to uncomfortable feelings by stifling their emotions for the sake of appearing masculine. Know that all of the feelings you experience are normal and it is okay to express them.

**Talk with Your Partner About Your Feelings.** Infertility is a couples issue no matter where the physical problem lies. Your partner experiences emotions just as you do and in talking about your feelings, you may discover your partner is experiencing similar emotions. In expressing your feelings you might also teach your partner a thing or two about what it feels like to experience emotions unique to you. This can only allow for greater understanding, empathy, and compassion between partners.

**Educate Yourself on Male Factor Infertility.** Learn all that you can about your unique issue of infertility. By educating yourself, you will discover that many men experience similar thoughts and emotions, as well as go through the same

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- Social support has been shown to be a major factor in successful coping
- It may be easier to share your emotions in private setting: there are many trained counselors who specialize in treating issues related to fertility

tests and procedures as you do. By educating yourself you will also feel more powerful by eliminating the unknown. You will know what to expect when asked to undergo new tests and procedures which can eliminate those “out of control” feelings.

### **Find a Support Group for Males Struggling with Infertility.**

Social support has been shown to be a major factor in coping ability. It may help to share your thoughts and feelings among a group of men experiencing the same procedures, feelings, and issues as you. Support among group members can make you feel “normal” and more grounded. You will also learn, from others, new and more effective ways to cope with male factor infertility. In this manner, you will begin to feel empowered.

**Seek Individual Counseling.** If you find that you are unable to share your feelings with a partner or other males, individual counseling is available. There are many trained counselors who specialize in treating issues related to infertility. All information you share is confidential and you may find it easier to express thoughts and emotions in a more private setting with a counselor who has the ability to listen empathically.

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