

Can I freeze my eggs to use later?

VITALAB FUN FACTS

1. You can now freeze your eggs for an indefinite period (no expiry date).
2. The average childbearing age has risen from 21 years in the 1970s to 29 years today.
3. Success rates for frozen egg cycles are 66.7%, one of the highest in Africa!

Vitalab is a leading fertility clinic in South Africa that has been providing services for more than 31 years. All the procedures we offer are performed onsite in our state of the art facility, where we use ground-breaking treatments in order to help individuals and couples achieve their dreams of starting a family.



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Why would I want to freeze my eggs?

As women get older, they may encounter difficulty getting pregnant (conceiving) with a healthy baby. Women are born with about 1-2 million eggs. Most of the eggs die off naturally (just like the way we lose skin and hair cells every

day). By the time a girl reaches puberty, she is left with about half a million eggs.

As she gets older, especially as women enter their mid- to late-30s and 40s, the eggs disappear more quickly. Also, the eggs that remain might be less able to lead to a healthy pregnancy because of the effects of aging on egg function (for more information, please refer to the ASRM booklet titled Age and Fertility).

Biologically, it is easier to get pregnant before age 30. However, due to professional, social, or health reasons, a woman might not be ready to get pregnant at that time and she might want to defer having a child until the time is right for her. Understanding the normal age effect on future fertility, these women may seek out treatments to remove and freeze eggs to be saved for potential use in the future.

What does egg freezing involve?

The actual treatment process is similar to the first part of the in vitro fertilization (IVF) process used to treat some patients with infertility (For more information about IVF, please refer to our website www.vitalab.com)

Briefly, a woman would have 10-12 days of daily injections to cause a group of her eggs to develop and mature. During this time, blood levels and ultrasounds will be done to track her response to the medicines. To remove the eggs,



the woman would then undergo a brief (15-30 minute, typically) outpatient procedure usually under conscious sedation to retrieve the eggs. Once removed and evaluated by a trained scientist--an embryologist-- the usable eggs can be frozen for an indefinite period .

Will my frozen eggs guarantee a future baby?

No. Even in younger women (i.e., <36-years-old), the chance that one frozen egg will yield a baby in the future is around 2-12%. As women get older and egg quality goes down, the pregnancy rate per frozen egg drops further.

Is there an age cut-off after which I shouldn't freeze eggs?

Before starting a freezing cycle, a woman would need to speak with a fertility specialist who will offer screening tests (blood evaluation and ultrasound) to determine if egg freezing is appropriate for her. Every woman is different regarding the effects of age on her fertility. Keep in mind; some women's fertility, may not deteriorate significantly until their early 40's. However, most experts agree that elective egg freezing is most successful for women younger than 36 years of age.

If I have eggs frozen, does this mean I can delay starting to have a family until I'm much older?

Understanding that cryopreserved eggs are not a guarantee of a future baby, a woman should start trying to conceive as soon as she feels "ready" and able. One concern is that a woman might have a sense of "false security" if she freezes eggs. She might delay her attempts to conceive until she is much older

(whereas she might have started trying at an earlier age, with greater success, if she hadn't frozen eggs in the first place). In addition to thinking about success rates of using frozen eggs, women should also understand the potential medical risks and psychosocial concerns of parenting at an advanced age. Many of the studies showing successful pregnancies with frozen eggs have only looked at women freezing their eggs in their 20s or early 30s. Another concern among fertility experts is that those pregnancy rates won't be as high for women trying to freeze eggs in their late 30s or early 40s.

Will my Medical Aid cover egg freezing?

Most health insurance/ medical aid plans do not cover elective egg freezing. However, for patients at high risk for premature menopause (menopause before 40)--i.e. patients about to undergo certain cancer treatments--some insurances might offer partial or complete coverage.

What costs are involved?

Costs can be divided into 3 broad phases:

- Consultation, medication, egg retrieval, egg freezing.
- Storage of eggs until use (usually an annual fee)
- Warming of the eggs, fertilizing them and transferring embryos to achieve a pregnancy

Key points:

- A woman who is not ready to have a child can choose to freeze eggs to try to preserve her ability to have a child later.
- Freezing eggs is not a guarantee of being able to have a child later.
- Not everyone is a candidate for egg freezing. Egg freezing typically works best for those in their 20s to early 30s, and is not usually recommended for women over 36 years.

