



Embryo Donation – A Family Building Option

*Majority of Content taken from “RESOLVE – Online Guide for Embryo Donation”
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Introduction

During your *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) treatment cycle(s), you may have created extra embryos that were cryopreserved (frozen) for use in future cycles. This may have resulted in surplus embryos that you, like many couples, will never use for your own reproductive purposes – because you completed your family, or decided not to proceed further with treatment.

If you have extra embryos you do not need for you own reproductive purposes, and are unsure what to do with them, this guide can help you make the decision that is right for you.

Please note: We recognize that an embryo donor and an embryo recipient may be a single individual or a couple. Here, the terms donor couple and recipient couple represent both.

What can we do with our extra embryos?

Your beliefs will influence your decision about your excess embryos. There are five options for you to consider:

Example	Explanation
1. Maintain in Storage	Continue to store your embryos and pay the annual storage fees.
1. Thaw with degeneration	The embryos are thawed and disposed of in a respectful manner.
2. Thaw for scientific study	These embryos are often used for such activities as: Training laboratory personnel Used to test laboratory quality assurance
3. Donated for science	These embryos are donated to science. They may not be thawed and used right away. An example of this option is stem cell research. Unfortunately, this is not always possible.
4. Embryo Donation	Embryos are donated by the Donating Parents to Embryo Donation Recipients .

This guide will focus on the option of donating your embryos to another couple.

Donate to another couple

If you choose to donate your embryos to another couple (the recipient couple) you are potentially helping them build their own families.

Couples consider using donated embryos for various reasons. They may wish to experience pregnancy, but:

- Have had multiple pregnancy losses unrelated to implantation or uterine issues
- Have had repeated IVF failures
- Risk transmitting genetic problems to their offspring

Some believe there an imbalance is introduced when using donor sperm or donor egg, as only one member of the couple is genetically related to the child. And others feel uncomfortable with adoption.

There are two types of embryo donation to another couple:

- Anonymous donation your identifying information is not given to the recipient couples
- Known donation you are identified to the recipient couple as the donor

Anonymous donation

Here at Advanced Fertility Care, like at many IVF clinics, we currently only offer anonymous embryo donation. This means that you, the donating couple, agree to transfer possession of ALL of your cryopreserved embryos to us with the purpose of providing them to one anonymous recipient in order to establish a pregnancy. In so doing, you will also agree to provide us with a complete de-identified personal, medical, genetic, family, and social history which will be shared with prospective recipients in order to facilitate their ability to choose which embryo donors would be most suitable for them.

When considering anonymous donation, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you believe embryo donation is like other tissue donations?
- Do you feel you cannot have psychological closure as long as the embryos remain frozen, and that anonymous donation may give you that closure?
- Would it make you feel good to potentially help another couple build their family, even if you do it anonymously?
- Would you prefer the boundary you would get from an anonymous, rather than known, donation?

Who should NOT consider donating embryos?

Embryo donation may not be right for you if you or your family has a history of heritable psychological or medical conditions, history of recent substance abuse or a history of sexual or physical abuse without professional treatment. If you have an unstable marriage, impaired cognitive function or mental incompetence, excessive stress, or engage in any high-risk behavior you should not consider embryo donation.

Other factors that would prevent you from donating your embryos include: you and your partner are not in agreement about donating your embryos or you are an employee of the IVF clinic where your embryos are stored.

If we decide to donate our embryos, what do we have to do?

At Advanced Fertility Care, you must be at least 21 years of age to donate your embryos. If you are interested in doing so, the next step would be for you to contact us here at the office so we can set up a phone or in-person consultation at which time one of our staff or physicians will review the requirements and next steps in the process.

Some additional steps that may be required of you would include:

- 1) Completion of donor questionnaire
- 2) Possible updated blood infectious disease and/or genetic screening
- 3) Optional or mandatory psychological counseling prior to donation (at AFC discretion).
- 4) Recommended, but optional, legal consultation with your attorney prior to signing of contracts

Who should we talk to about making this decision?

It is strongly recommended that couples who wish to donate their excess frozen embryos to another couple meet with a mental health professional. Psychological counseling is often offered at the clinic or program during the decision-making process. Since both male and female partners are considered potential embryo donors, you should both talk to a mental health professional.

During the appointments, you may be asked about your family medical and reproductive history and your psychiatric history. The mental health professional may want to know about your educational background, your current stresses and coping skills, and if you have any substance abuse or abuse/neglect issues. You may also be asked about your motivation to donate and any emotional attachment you may have to the embryos.

The purpose of these meetings is to make sure that all parties are fully informed and in agreement before proceeding with the embryo donation, and to explore thoughts, feelings and fantasies regarding this unique family-building option.

If you are considering embryo donation, answer the following questions:

- Have you evaluated all options for your surplus embryos?
- Are you clear about the psychological and ethical issues inherent in donating embryos?

There are many things to consider. For example, some couples feelings change about embryo donation after they have children through IVF. They say they can no longer donate a potential child once they equate it to the one they are now parenting. On the other hand, some couples who have gone through IVF and completed their families feel that their donating their unused embryos would be a wonderful gift to give a couple struggling with infertility.

Some individuals and couples who are comfortable donating gametes (sperm and egg) feel very differently about donating embryos. Many gamete donors say that they have no emotional ties to their eggs or sperm but perceive embryos as potential children.

There are unique considerations if you used donated gametes to create the embryos you are thinking about donating. This situation may trigger a variety of different feelings. There may be differences in desire to donate embryos based on which partners gametes were used to create the embryos. Conflict may arise if the partner using his/her gametes feels more entitled to make the decision to donate or not.

Will we be paid for donating our embryos?

You will not be paid for any part of the embryo donation or for any additional steps that may be required which will enable you to donate your embryos.

The recipient couple will pay for their own screening tests, counseling, and subsequent costs to thaw and transfer the embryos. The recipient couples costs for an entire cycle including screening may range from \$2,500 to \$7,000, and might not include psychological counseling or legal fees. Even if there are no embryos to transfer after the thaw procedure, the recipient will incur all expenses.

What legal and ethical factors should we consider?

There are several legal and ethical factors to consider. The embryos could be damaged during the thaw process, or not survive. Donation requires that you give up all rights and responsibilities to any donated embryos or any child born of such arrangement, even if you are unsuccessful with your own future infertility treatments. You should be aware that any child born through embryo donation would be your genetic offspring and a full sibling to any of your biological children. The future psychological implications, both positive and negative, need to be carefully considered by both families.

Informed consent is a process of communication between a patient and physician culminating in or manifested by a contract. It should be a clear expression of the intent of all parties involved and should define the nature of the relationship created. It should also acknowledge that the law regarding embryo donation is unsettled, unless you or the other couple are residents of one of the few states with embryo donation laws. There is little legal precedent regarding embryo donation. We highly recommend that all parties should seek separate, independent legal representation prior to consenting to donation and signing any consent forms or agreements. Prevailing state law as well as the specific needs and circumstances of each party should dictate the precise terms of contractual provisions. To date, only California, Florida, Louisiana, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Texas have enacted legislation particular to embryo donation.

Summary: Is embryo donation the right choice for us?

If you are considering embryo donation, answer the following questions:

- In general, how open or closed are you about your personal history?
- Did you tell others about your IVF?
- Did you tell others that you have cryopreserved embryos?
- Have you told, or do you plan to tell your child that he/she was conceived through IVF?
- Are there any health concerns with your existing child?
- What ethical, moral or religious concerns do you have about embryo donation?
- Are you okay with knowing that:
 - You will not have any role in the selection of the recipient.
 - You will not be told if and when the match and the donation have taken place.
 - You will not know if a pregnancy resulted.

- You will never know the recipient couple.
- You will never receive any updates on any child or children that result from your donation.
- Would you tell your existing children that they may have a genetic sibling, and if so, at what age?
- How do you think your children will be impacted by the knowledge that they have full genetic siblings being raised by another family? Will the children have contact with one another?
- How would you and your partner feel if one of your children died, and you knew a child resulting from your embryo donation resided with another family?
- How would grandparents and other extended family respond if told about the decision to donate embryos?

Perhaps the major underlying issue is how much control you do or do not have over the outcomes related to your embryos. If the answer to any of these questions raises difficulty, you should seek counseling before you make a decision to donate your embryos.

What resources are available to us?

RESOLVE: The National Infertility Association

National Office: (617) 623-1156

HelpLine: (888) 623-0744

Email: info@resolve.org

Website: www.resolve.org

2001 Assisted Reproductive Technology Success Rates Report

CDC Website: www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/art.htm

American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)

Website: www.asrm.org

Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology (SART)

Website: www.sart.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Website: www.cdc.gov

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Website: www.fda.gov

American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB)

Website: www.aatb.org