

# IVF FAQ

The desire of married couples to have children is God-given because, “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord; the fruit of the womb a reward” (Psalm 127:3). For couples struggling with infertility, the emotional pain that comes when the desire for children remains unfulfilled is immense. Many couples walking through the journey of infertility are presented with the option of in vitro fertilization (IVF). While creating life outside the womb is not expressly prohibited in Scripture, there are parts of IVF that run counter to the high value God places on human life.

The information below is a tool prepared by leaders from Shiloh, Watermark’s infertility ministry, with the support of the Watermark elders, to help believers answer questions regarding IVF and navigate infertility treatment plans in obedience to the Word of God. We encourage all Christ-followers walking through the painful journey of infertility to process each decision in community with other believers, using Scripture as your guide. If you or someone you care about is dealing with infertility or issues surrounding IVF, please contact Shiloh ([shiloh@watermark.org](mailto:shiloh@watermark.org)), Watermark’s infertility ministry for further support.

## **WHEN DOES LIFE BEGIN?**

Science confirms life begins the moment an egg is fertilized by a sperm - a living person in his or her earliest stages of growth - a life distinct from his or her mother. The only difference between an embryo, an infant, a teenager, and an adult is time. “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” (Luke 1:44)

## **WHAT IS IN VITRO FERTILIZATION (IVF)?**

The words “in vitro” mean “in glass.” In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a medical procedure where eggs are removed from a woman’s ovaries and fertilized in a culture dish in a laboratory setting then exposed to sperm collected from a man. When fertilization occurs, the egg and sperm join to create the first cell of a new, unique person. Once the egg is fertilized, it develops into an embryo which can be transferred by a doctor into a woman’s body where it has the opportunity to attach to the uterus, also called implantation.

Couples are encouraged to only attempt to create the number of embryos they are willing to transfer immediately or in the near future - meaning if a woman's egg count allows, they should limit the number of those eggs exposed to sperm. For example, if a doctor recommends transferring only two embryos, then only two eggs should be fertilized at that time. When a couple requests to limit the number of embryos created, they should also prepare to hear from doctors that they are statistically reducing the chances of an embryo developing on the first attempt.

## **WHAT IS THE EMBRYO GRADING PROCESS?**

Before an embryo is transferred into a woman's body, each embryo is subjectively given a letter grade based on its quality. Embryos with grades of A or B are considered high quality and suitable for transfer, while embryos graded C, D, or lower are considered poor quality and may not be recommended for transfer. That said, it is still possible for a lower-graded embryo to develop normally like a higher-graded embryo. Because all lives are precious and valuable to our Creator, couples must understand their responsibility to choose life for every embryo created, no matter the grade a clinic assigns them.

## **WHAT IS CRYOPRESERVATION?**

In the IVF process, it is standard for doctors to attempt to produce more embryos than can be safely transferred into a woman's body in a single transfer cycle. In fact, most doctors will not transfer more than one to two embryos per transfer cycle. So, what happens to the "extra" embryos that were created but not initially transferred into the woman's body? Most doctors will encourage cryopreservation, the process of freezing embryos to save for future use.

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." (James 4:13-14)

James makes it clear that none of us can predict the future or know if circumstances might arise preventing these frozen embryos from being carried by a mother to maturity. That said, couples are encouraged to only attempt to create the number of embryos they are willing to transfer. Creating human life without the intention to transfer them violates the exhortation of Scripture. All humans should be allowed to develop, living out all the days God has ordained for them.

As an alternative to freezing embryos, eggs can be frozen prior to exposure to sperm. Then the frozen eggs can be thawed later to be used for IVF based on the number of embryos the couple is willing to transfer.

## **WHAT IF WE ALREADY HAVE FROZEN EMBRYOS?**

Many couples already have embryos frozen through cryopreservation. The Watermark Elders exhort those who have frozen embryos to fight for those lives as they would for children of any age. Parents with frozen embryos are urged to either transfer those embryos themselves or personally choose a loving family that will adopt and faithfully shepherd these young lives.

## **WHAT IS GENETIC TESTING?**

Genetic testing assesses whether an embryo will be recommended for implantation or termination. This practice is in opposition to the high value God's Word places on human life. Watermark's Elders do not condone the termination of embryos for any reason, including evidence that there may be a genetic abnormality. When human life is created, we must cultivate, steward, cherish, honor, and shepherd it, regardless of the value the world places on that life. The information below provides detail on the genetic testing process and why it is inconsistent with God's Word.

The two types of genetic testing performed on embryos are preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) and preimplantation genetic screening (PGS). PGD tests cells for specific genes related to diseases like cystic fibrosis or hemophilia. PGS examines cells for abnormalities such as missing or extra chromosomes.

There are many reasons why both PGD and PGS pose a risk to human life:

- Neither test is 100% accurate; inconclusive results and false positives or negatives are always a possibility.
- Embryos may contain some cells with chromosomal abnormalities and other cells that are normal. There is evidence that these embryos are capable of correcting themselves and developing into healthy infants.
- Both PGD and PGS require cells to be removed from embryos, and this can damage the embryos.
- God is the giver of life; we must honor the days ordained for every life He allows to be created.

## **HOW DOES A COUPLE BIBLICALLY EVALUATE AND NAVIGATE THE IVF PROCESS?**

As with any decision of this magnitude, Watermark elders once again encourage couples to process each decision in community with other believers, using Scripture as your guide. If you or someone you care about is dealing with infertility or issues surrounding IVF, please contact Shiloh ([shiloh@watermark.org](mailto:shiloh@watermark.org)), Watermark's infertility ministry for further support.

"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." (Proverbs 15:22)

It is important that couples are united and share their beliefs and desires with their doctor at their initial consultation to ensure that the clinic will honor the couple's wishes. Some clinics are unwilling to adjust their protocols to honor the biblical direction provided here. For example, a clinic may not let you only attempt to fertilize only one or two eggs, transfer or freeze an embryo graded lower than A or B (thus forcing you to discard it), or allow you to do IVF without genetic testing. Therefore, it is crucial to find a doctor and clinic who value every life created and are willing to honor a careful approach to IVF.

## WHAT OTHER FACTORS RELATED TO THE IVF PROCESS SHOULD WE CONSIDER?

When deciding if IVF is something you want to pursue as a couple, you should consider how it can impact purity, financial stewardship, marital health, time, physical health, and mental health.

- **Purity:** The Bible exhorts all to purity; therefore, when collecting/giving semen for the purposes of testing or treatment, God's standards must be maintained. The use of pornography or immoral thoughts does not honor God's intention for His people. Couples should talk to their doctor about producing a sample at home or at the clinic with your spouse in a way that honors God's intention for intimacy in marriage.

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." (Hebrews 13:4)

- **Financial Stewardship:** Scripture testifies that all we have belongs to God. It also discourages believers from going into debt. While some insurance companies cover the cost of IVF, many do not. When funds are not readily available for IVF, couples should show caution and seek the counsel of other believers before undertaking the expense of infertility treatment.

"The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender." (Proverbs 22:7)

- **Marital Health:** Couples should consider the health of their marriage before entering into fertility treatment. Husbands and wives should thoroughly discuss and be unified on IVF and any related treatments.

"Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ... In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. ... However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (Ephesians 5:22-33)

- **Time:** IVF often requires a significant amount of time, especially for the wife. You may have appointments multiple times per week. It will also involve ordering specialized medications and administering them frequently.
- **Physical and Mental Health:** As a part of IVF, women are exposed to hormones at levels significantly higher than what occurs naturally. All women react differently to this process, but it can cause both physical and mental stress.