Freezing Your Eggs
(Egg Cryopreservation)

Starting a family may be the furthest thing from your mind right now. But some cancer treatments may affect your ability to become pregnant later on.

What is cryopreservation?
The prefix “cryo” means cold. So cryopreservation is preserving, or keeping your eggs stored under very cold temperatures, until you are ready to become a parent. Freezing the eggs from your ovaries is something you can do to try and preserve your fertility now. These eggs are saved in case you need them to try and have a baby later in life when you are past cancer.

Am I eligible for egg cryopreservation?
For some, delaying the start of your cancer treatment to collect and freeze your eggs is not safe. Talk to your provider about whether or not it would be safe for you to preserve your eggs before starting your cancer treatment.

When should cryopreservation be done?
If your provider feels it is safe and you want to store your eggs, the best time to do this is before starting cancer treatment. In some cases it can also be done after treatment has started or between different treatments.

How long will it take?
The process of preparing and retrieving the eggs from your ovaries takes a minimum of 2 weeks.

Many young women prefer this method of fertility preservation because it does not require the sperm of a partner or donor sperm. There are many things you will want to think about before you choose egg cryopreservation.

How does cancer treatment affect my fertility?
You are born with a set amount of eggs stored in your two ovaries. Your body does not make new eggs over time. The number of eggs you have in your ovaries at a particular time is called your “ovarian reserve.”

Chemotherapy and radiation treatments attack fast growing cells like cancer cells, and in the process can destroy healthy cells like your eggs at the same time, reducing your ovarian reserve. This can cause a condition called primary ovarian failure, a loss of normal ovarian function at a young age, resulting in irregular or no periods, infertility, and menopause (stopping of ovulation).

How cancer treatment can affect you fertility depends on:
- Your age at the time of treatment
- The type of cancer you have
- The kind of chemotherapy drugs that you receive
- Where on your body you get radiation
- How much chemotherapy and radiation you receive
- How long it has been since treatment when you try to have a baby
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If you decide to choose egg cryopreservation

Once you and your provider decide egg cryopreservation is an option, you will meet with a reproductive endocrinology and infertility (REI) doctor outside of Seattle Children’s. This is a doctor who specializes in helping people who have problems with fertility become pregnant.

Your REI doctor will discuss the step-by-step process of egg cryopreservation and will guide you through the procedure.

Steps to egg cryopreservation includes:

• Checking your baseline fertility and ovarian reserve (ovary egg count).
• Stimulating the ovaries to produce several eggs by using hormone shots in the skin or muscle 1 to 3 times a day for 12 days.
• Monitoring your body’s response to the hormone shots (blood tests and vaginal ultrasounds).
• Having a simple surgery to retrieve eggs and place them in cold storage.

You may have a bit of bleeding and discomfort in your lower abdomen area for a few days after the procedure. Most people feel fine within 1 to 2 days after the procedure. Some women notice a difference in their menstrual flow after this procedure and some may notice that their next period may be heavier than usual.

After egg retrieval, your eggs will be carefully handled, frozen and stored.

How long can my eggs be stored?

The eggs can be stored for many years until you are ready to have a child and become a parent. When you decide you are ready to become a parent, the frozen egg can then be thawed and fertilized with sperm, outside of the body. The fertilized egg can be implanted into your uterus.

How much will this cost me or my family?

Egg cryopreservation is expensive and your health insurance may not cover the costs. Your healthcare team will talk to you more about how much it will cost and any financial assistance available to you.

Web Resources

Fertility Preservation Video – Cancer Treatments and a Woman’s Fertility: Learn about the personal journeys of three female cancer patients.

www.seattlechildrens.org/videos/cancer-treatments-womans-fertility/

Livestrong Foundation www.livestrong.org/we-can-help/fertility-services/

MyOncofertility www.myoncofertility.org/

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Free Interpreter Services

• In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
• From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.