

**Advice from a Boston IVF Doctor**  
**Don't lose sight of the big picture!**  
By Steven Bayer MD



During an IVF cycle, many patients receive a lot of positive feedback. You may have been told "the follicles are developing nicely", "we have a good number of eggs to work with", "the embryos are of excellent quality" and, finally, "the embryo transfer went just perfectly". Throughout the two week waiting period you remain optimistic but then you are stunned when you are told the pregnancy test was negative. It just doesn't make any sense. How could this be when everything seemed to be going so well?

After an unsuccessful IVF cycle, patients are looking for answers. Some will ask what did I do wrong or what should I do differently next cycle? Maybe more rest is needed after the embryo transfer or maybe the diet or exercise regimen needs to be modified. To be frank, after the embryos are transferred into the uterus, it is virtually out of your control and really left up to fate. While IVF success rates are higher than they have ever been, failures underscore how inefficient our reproductive systems are. It must be realized that if a fertile 35 year old woman ventures out that first month to try for a pregnancy on her own and times intercourse perfectly-- she has only a 15-20% chance of becoming pregnant. Furthermore, of those pregnancies that are achieved, approximately 1 in 4 will result in a miscarriage. The conclusion is that many of the eggs that a woman produces cannot be fertilized and lead to a successful pregnancy. With these statistics one often wonders how any couple is able to achieve a successful pregnancy! But for those couples just starting to try on their own their chance of success increases with time--70% will be successful in 6 months. The same holds true with IVF. Depending on individual circumstances, IVF success rates for any cycle ranges between 10-50% and the cumulative pregnancy rate continues to go up with each successive cycle.

There are some things you can do to increase your chance of success. Practice a healthy lifestyle—limit caffeine and alcohol intake and completely avoid tobacco. Try to manage the stress. Every couple dealing with infertility is stressed to some degree. You just can't turn off stress, but the Domar Center at Boston IVF has many programs to help you reduce and manage the stress including a mind and body program, acupuncture, yoga, and counseling. Any of these programs will give you a better sense of control, lower the stress and possibly increase the chance of success. It is also important for you to be engaged with your medical team. After a cycle of treatment, you

will meet with your physician to review the results and determine whether any changes need to be made in the protocol for the next cycle. The good news is that IVF success rates have never been higher. So if you are faced with an unsuccessful cycle, don't lose hope and don't lose sight of the bigger picture.

Dr. Steven R. Bayer joined Boston IVF in 1998. After receiving his medical degrees from Ohio State University, he completed his research fellowship in Reproductive Endocrinology in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Beth Israel Hospital and the Harvard Medical School in Boston. Dr. Bayer has written numerous published articles, book chapters and is the first author of a book entitled "The Boston IVF Handbook of Infertility". He is actively involved in clinical research which has focused on the identification of factors that affect IVF success and ovulation induction protocols used for IVF. He has a special interest in ovulatory disorders, reproductive surgery and in vitro fertilization. Dr. Bayer is a Clinical Instructor at the Harvard Medical School and he is on staff at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Newton Wellesley Hospital. He takes great pride in his wife and four children and lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. In his spare time he enjoys woodworking, bicycling and playing basketball and tennis.

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**Winter 2008 Newsletter**

**From the desk of Ali Domar**



One of the things that the commercialization of the holidays has done is to inadvertently make the season more painful for individuals and couples who are experiencing infertility. December used to be known as the time when Christians and Jews alike celebrated a holy day, or series of holy days. The focus was on celebrating the birth of a savior and the miracles reported from ancient times. Now however, the focus is on shopping, especially for toys, and you can't open a newspaper or watch a commercial on television which doesn't feature a wide eyed toddler opening a stack of gifts. For those of you who don't yet have the toddler, the season may feel empty, isolating, and painful.

In addition, many patients tend to mark the length of time they have been trying by these holidays, as in here is yet another Christmas and we still don't have a baby.

There is no question that this is a challenging time for many, but there are in fact a number of ways to make this season a better one. First of all, be very self-protective. I don't care if it is a family tradition that everyone gets to your parents' house at 6 am on Christmas morning to watch your nieces and nephews tear open their loot. Make your own new tradition-you and your partner sleep in, sip hot cocoa, make love for fun, and only get to your parents' house in time for a good meal. Better yet-grab one of those last minute cruise deals or head to New Hampshire for a night at a B&B.

You can also help yourself feel better by helping others who are less fortunate. Many nonprofit organizations depend heavily on volunteers and this is the time of year when the volunteers are too busy with their own lives to help out. Step up and help. Research shows that this is a highly effective way to help yourself feel better.

Finally, celebrate the real spirit of the season. Think about the meaning of the holidays as they were originally intended, and see if a different focus can make this more of a time of serenity, rather than of deprivation.



**Ask Ali!**

Dr. Domar will answer the most popular fertility questions received from our website and post them here in our quarterly newsletter. She will also post answers pertaining to general health on our website at [www.domarcenter.com](http://www.domarcenter.com). If you are interested in asking Ali a question, please email us at [domarinfo@domarcenter.com](mailto:domarinfo@domarcenter.com).

**Q: How do I know when to stop treatment? I have had two unsuccessful IVF cycles and the thought of starting another one is overwhelming me.**

A: I suspect that every infertility patient wonders if she will know when to stop. At some level, it is probably easier if you live outside of an insurance-covered state since not having the money to continue makes the decision for you. The first step is to talk to your doctor. Your response to the medication, the number of eggs retrieved and fertilized, and the quality of your embryos are all factors which would go into a medical recommendation. Stopping treatment, at least with our own eggs, might make a lot more sense of you haven't produced good quality embryos. In general though, the number one reason why patients stop treatment is not physician recommendation but the stress of the experience. Think about what you can do to reduce your level of stress before and during a future cycle. Research shows that participation in a mind/body program will not only help you feel less depressed and anxious, but it is also associated with a significant increase in pregnancy rates.

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