

Fertility Information for Adolescents and Young Adults Needing Cancer Treatment

There are nearly 500,000 cancer survivors of reproductive age in the United States. These survivors are planning the rest of their life and having a family. Cancer treatments including radiation and chemotherapy have improved and cause fewer harmful side effects for patients but they still can damage fertility. Fertility preservation techniques work best when they are done before cancer treatment starts.

Infertility is a big concern to men and women of childbearing age. Male cancer survivors most often have impaired fertility from chemotherapy or radiation induced damage to their sperm. Female survivors may have impaired fertility from any treatment that damages immature eggs, affects the body's hormonal balance, or injures the reproductive organs.

- **Before treatment:** Be your own advocate. Ask your cancer team about fertility-saving options as soon as possible after your cancer diagnosis. Get all of your questions answered and if needed get a referral to Reproductive Medicine for a preservation procedure.
- **During treatment:** If getting radiation to abdomen or pelvis area, shielding must be used. Question your team about medications and their potential risk to your fertility. If you are sexually active while you are getting cancer treatment, use a condom and/or other form of birth control to prevent a pregnancy.
- **After treatment:** Wait 1 to 2 years (or more) after you stop treatment to start a family. Continue to use a condom and/or other form of birth control to prevent a pregnancy, even if you think you are infertile. It can take 1 to 2 years for healthy sperm to grow if you are not using sperm that you cryopreserved. If fertility does not return after cancer treatment and you did not do cryopreservation, there are other ways to build your family. Some examples include using sperm from a donor, adopting a donor egg or embryo or adopting a child.

Fertility preservation or starting a family can be expensive. Some insurance companies cover part of the cost of these processes and some employers include fertility preservation/family planning options as part of their insurance policy for employees. The Reproductive Medicine Center of Froedtert and the Medical College of WI. is a member of the LiveSTRONG fertility network and offers discounted rates to individuals that meet criteria for fertility preservation. There are other resources available to patients to help offset some of the charges for family planning. Please see resources below.

It is common to feel angry, be frustrated or feels a sense of loss if you are potentially unable to have a child. Talk with your team about your feelings, find a support group or ask for a referral to a counselor. You may find it helpful to discuss your feelings.

Resources on Fertility Preservation for Cancer Patients:

- www.myoncofertility.org - Patient education resources provided by the Oncofertility Consortium. The Oncofertility Consortium is a NIH-supported interdisciplinary research consortium exploring relationships between health, disease, survivorship, and fertility preservation in young cancer patients
- **LIVESTRONG Fertility** - Information and support for cancer patients and survivors at risk for infertility
- <http://www.froedtert.com/fertility>
- <http://www.cancer.gov>
- <http://www.nccn.org/patients>
- <http://www.thesamfund.org>