

Beautiful EGGS

My Journey with Donated Eggs

BY LAURA NUNLEY

If I were to advise a woman considering having a baby through in vitro fertilization with a donated egg, I would tell her to do some research, but not too much. Read blogs on the subject, but not too many. Give your mind just enough to think about without overwhelming it with all the differing opinions on the subject. Pick an issue and find two opposite reactions to it. Then stop researching and let your mind go to work.

One of my biggest concerns when contemplating having a baby with another woman's DNA was whether I would bond with that baby. I did a little reading. I remember hanging onto the *Desperate Housewives* star Marcia Cross's comment, "When a woman gets older, they get donor eggs, which doesn't make the baby any less beautiful or perfect." While she hadn't admitted to using an egg donor to conceive her twins, I was comforted by this statement. I also read a blog by a woman whose quote I have used many times, paraphrased: "Who says my genetics are so superior? Maybe I'm doing my children a favour by borrowing genes."

Then I read a blog from a woman who was having difficulty bonding with her baby conceived with a donor egg. She said she kept seeing the image of the donor in the face of her child. It's been four years since I read that blog, but it wasn't until recently that I realized how my mind dealt with that information. When I received pictures of the donor we eventually chose, I looked at them briefly, appreciated them, and then put them away, never to look at them again.

Now, when I gaze into the faces of my three beautiful children who were conceived with the help of that donor, I do not see the physical characteristics they share with the egg donor. I see my husband, and I see my children. I even see a little of myself.

After all, our DNA mixed in my womb. During mammalian pregnancy, in a process called fetal-maternal microchimerism, the mother and fetus exchange DNA and cells. A study of women who had died in their seventies found that over half of the women had male DNA in their brains, presumably from when the women's sons were in the womb. Male DNA was also discovered in women's blood samples. Not only have fetal cells been detected in the mother, but maternal cells have been found in the fetus.

I know every mother's experience who has a baby with donated eggs is probably different. I had the advantage of having one of my own genetic children to compare with the experience of having babies conceived with donated eggs. Is there a difference in how I feel between my oldest son and his three younger siblings? Yes.

Probably the biggest difference is the genetic mirror my oldest son holds up and in which I can see myself. Although he doesn't look much like me, so many of his behaviours and attitudes feel familiar. I instinctively know how to handle some of his more difficult moods because I, too, have experienced them. I know when to encourage certain interests because they are my interests.

My interaction with my two daughters and youngest son is different. While the genetic mirror is missing, what I have with them is a deep appreciation for the interesting and bright people they are, so superior to me in many ways. My three-year-old daughter is very clever and talented with language. She is also incredibly capable physically. Her younger brother is a total powerhouse and has an ability to look anyone in the eye without a blink or a flinch. Their sister is the sweetest spitfire I have ever come across, so agile and perceptive.

With my older son, I feel a sort of possessiveness. With my other three children, I feel tender respect - and so much gratitude. I feel tremendously privileged that I get to be their mother, to be a guiding force as they grow, and to participate in their already amazing lives.

Besides that, I still connect on a very intimate level with my youngest children in the way that human beings naturally relate to each other. My oldest daughter has a need to rebel, not in a malicious way, but in a way that gives her energy and vibrancy. I understand that. My youngest daughter needs a lot of affection. I understand that too. My youngest son demolishes everything, thinks it's fun, and looks to the faces of his parents for confirmation that they think it's fun too. Yup. I get that.

When we just had two children, one of whom is my genetic child and the other who is not, sometimes I would worry about my bond with my daughter, the younger child. When talking to my friends and family I would refer to the egg donor as my daughter's "biological mother." But, uncomfortable with the phrase, I thought about how my daughter grew in my womb, and how, without me, she would not exist. I started calling the egg donor "the egg donor." Words matter.

Now that my daughter is older and I have two more children conceived with the embryos created from the first round of IVF, I no longer need to reassure myself. I am these children's mother, and only I - and my husband - can give them the understanding, cuddles, discipline, and love that they need. There is not one jot of difference between how much I love my genetic child and how much I love my other children. I love them all intensely and with equal strength.

While I never see the likeness of our egg donor on the faces of my children I believe our donor's character is evident in my children's personalities. According to the egg donor coordinators at the fertility clinic, our donor's greatest motivation was to be of service to others. They described her as vivacious, witty, and energetic. I sense this young woman's magnanimity, sense of humour, and intellect in my children as they grow and develop. I feel incredibly fortunate to have got her genes in my family.

Every single one of my pregnancies, while difficult in my forties, was full of delicious anticipation. Every single one of my deliveries was the best

experience of my life. Holding all four of my babies on my chest in the hospital was more sacred than any religious ritual. I now have four children ages five and younger, and it is not easy. But it is more profound and fulfilling than anything I ever could have imagined.

In my single days I never knew that, when you have children, you receive as much, or more, as you give. Each one of my four children, whether genetically related to me or not, is my teacher. Each child loves me without reserve, whether I deserve it or not. I can no longer sweep my frustration, anger, and anxiety under the rug because it affects my relationship with my children. My laughter has more than quadrupled, and my general level of happiness is a sweet contentment. To me, four of the most beautiful creations on this planet are my children.

In my mind, there is no question. If you can't have babies using your own eggs, you either adopt or you undergo IVF with donated eggs. The net gain is so much greater than any kind of cost. And when you are snuggling your baby to sleep every night, you will thank your lucky stars you have such immeasurable riches in your life.

So, to the woman who is considering egg donation, do your research. But stop before someone else's negative perceptions damage an otherwise optimistic outlook regarding your own possibilities. Armed with the information you do have, thank the universe for modern science and go forward with courage and confidence. Only life's most precious experiences await.

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Looking Further Afield

Nova IVI Fertility Celebrate 25,000 Pregnancies



India is one of the most affordable destinations for in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and other infertility treatments anywhere in the world. In a country with over 500 individual infertility treatment centres it is no mean achievement that Nova IVI Fertility (NIF) has achieved remarkable success, rapidly become one of the largest and most influential service providers in the world-wide fertility market.

In only its seventh year since inception, NIF has successfully completed over 50,000* cycles and has recently achieved 25,000* pregnancies (*Based on internal data)

This dramatic rise has been due, in part to NIF's strategic partnership with the Spanish Group IVI Fertility, a global leader in assisted fertility treatment. The enhanced programme of Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) which is offered throughout India has resulted in a substantial addition to Nova's IVF services and technology, including proprietary software, training and quality management.

In addition to providing core procedures such as IUI, IVF and Andrology services, NIF offers several state-of-the-art technologies such as Vitrofication for preserving embryos and eggs, Embryoscope and ERA to find out the timing of the uterus' capacity to accept embryos. All procedures that significantly improve the chances of a pregnancy following IVF-ICSI, even in patients with multiple previous failures.

With IVF's know-how and vast international expertise, NIF is able to bring the same exceptional standard of processes, protocols and policies to India.

Unparalleled Support

Whilst India has seen a significant rise in the number of patients opting for fertility treatment, the numbers are still significantly lower than those that actually require medical intervention. One of the major reasons for this is the lack of awareness amongst the public about the basic concept that infertility is a disease which needs to be addressed medically.

NIF takes its role as one of India's leading fertility treatment providers seriously and for this reason invests substantial time and resources into both raising awareness of infertility and ensuring that its service is delivered appropriately and sensitively.

It was launched with the commitment to offer standardised and ethically based fertility treatment, as well as addressing the urgent need for an authoritative and respected brand leader to assume the responsibility for developing the country's strategic response to the ever increasing incidence of infertility related issues.

This commitment runs throughout the organisation and staff at NIF are trained to be both sensitive and responsive to patients who are

often vulnerable and experiencing high levels of anxiety as they progress through fertility treatment. Impressively, Nova offers qualified counsellors (each with a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology or Clinical Counselling) who provide guidance and support at every step in the patient's journey.

International Work

Treatment is by no means cheap. Having repeated cycles of treatment can add to the costs and prices can inflate easily. NIF believes in fixed pricing; every treatment is created as a package and patients are provided with an all-inclusive cost - there are no hidden charge, no nasty surprises! This is particularly useful for international patients as it makes it easier to plan and budget for treatment. In addition international patients are offered;

- Visa assistance
- Flight arrangements and extensions
- Airport transfer service
- Scheduling of all medical appointments
- Coordination of the admission process
- Cost estimates for anticipated treatment
- Assistance in hotel/service apartment booking
- Providing language translators for select languages
- Telemedicine facilities for consultations and follow up with doctors
- Foreign exchange

In the UK, Nova IVI Fertility is pleased to be working in collaboration with the International Fertility Company internationalfertilitycompany.com; providing a unique and ground breaking service for UK couples seeking to travel to India to address their specific fertility needs.

Contact:

If you are interested in talking to a representative from Nova IVI Fertility; arranging a skype conversation or meeting our team at one of the events we are attending in 2019/20, please use the contact details below;

k.sriram@novaivifertility.net
andrew@internationalfertilitycompany.com

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Genes aren't what make a child happy

The story of Cheryl and her little Luca at Clinica Tambre

After two failed pregnancy attempts with her own eggs, Cheryl came to the conclusion that it was unlikely that she would conceive in that way. For her and her partner, it was hard to digest but they were not willing to give up on their dream of raising a family. It was her doctor who encouraged them to visit Clinica Tambre and explore their possibilities.

Her experience with Clinica Tambre

Cheryl says that she and her boyfriend immediately felt at home with Clinica Tambre as soon as they walked through the door;

"The medical team explained the options to us very clearly; resolved our doubts and answered our questions whilst giving us time to make our decision in a very measured way. We were extremely impressed with the way we were treated, respected and how we felt valued from day one."

Conversations with the couple were undertaken in two languages (English for Cheryl and Spanish for her boyfriend) to ensure both fully understood

their options and it was agreed that the clinic's egg donation programme was the most appropriate way forward. It is quite normal and natural for any prospective parents to have doubts and fears about fertility treatment and this couple were no different. In this case, Cheryl was worried that her baby would not have her genes and, therefore, an Anglo-Spanish mixture. This concern was specifically addressed by the clinic's medical and psychological team who explained that it was the love, care and support that parents offered which were the most important elements which, when combined, had the most profound effect on a child's development. Put simply, "Genes are not what make a child happy!".

This is just what the couple wanted to hear.

Reassured, the couple began their fertility journey with the clinic; a process like a rollercoaster ride which offered moments of both joy and a little anxiety. Although it sounds very simple, Cheryl emphasized the importance of being treated like a 'person' throughout the process rather than merely a 'patient'. Cheryl found it difficult to put into words

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her appreciation of the work of both doctors Marbán and Santiago, who helped her during the difficult and challenging times.

"It was when we needed the most help that we received the most support," Cheryl said.

How do you feel now?

Now, four months after her son, Luca, was born, Cheryl couldn't be happier. She reflects daily about her fertility journey and is thankful that hers was successful;

"Being a mother is a wonderful experience, a wonderful feeling, even when she cries," she confesses with laughter looking at her baby.

Cheryl was extremely pleased about her experience with Clinica Tambre;

"The choice of which clinic to go to is crucial and what happens there will affect the rest of your life" she says, "Choose a clinic that feels right for you not merely because of its reputation".

And the final word from the new mum, "Don't give up even when faced with the most difficult of challenges, in the end it gets done".



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Conceivable by Russell Davis

Andrew Coutts takes a look at a practical guide designed to change your experience of your fertility journey and fast track your chances of success written by Coach, Cognitive Hypnotherapist and *Fertility Road* contributor, **Russell Davis**.



Making the Magic Happen

'Conceivable' is borne from Russell and his wife Bevan's, own 10 year fertility journey. It is a portrait of self discovery and whilst it contains insight and practical advice which will no doubt help both men and women on their respective fertility journey's it is perhaps more enlightening from the male perspective.

From the outset Russell is at pains to dismiss the guide as some sort of text book for the infertile - he wants us to immerse ourselves in the experience and use it to rethink and reboot our journey;

"I want to encourage you to read this book for an experience, not making notes, underlining or folding pages down".

The small, bite sized chapters make this an easy read and the title of one of the chapters, 'Project You v Project Baby' really sums up the rationale behind the experience. Making the magic happen, creating a happy end for your fertility journey, will only be achievable once you carry out your own emotional audit of where you are; understand, accept, and if necessary adapt, then 'Project Baby' will be easier to manage and achieve.

The resource reinforces the notion that all journey's are about the whole not the part. Russell manages to illustrate this notion clearly throughout this thought provoking guide which reads more like a personal notebook, created from pure experience which is kindly handed down with love to anyone experiencing fertility issues rather than a cold textbook signposting do's and don'ts. As Russell points out;

"I wish CONCEIVABLE was around 30 years ago because it is a fantastic resource for both those trying to conceive and those caring for them. I wish I had read it 30 years ago"

Riding the Rollercoaster

Russell's use of the analogy of the Rollercoaster Ride is a particularly apt and appropriate one.

The fertility journey can be a very bumpy, uncomfortable but ultimately exhilarating ride.

The guide meets the rollercoaster head on; challenging us to examine and process our own emotions; accepting that the whole experience can be extremely tough but ultimately it is the acceptance itself which can be the key to unlocking the journey;

"Acceptance is the WD40 of change. Once you allow what is to be you can begin to move on from it!"

Russell sums this up perfectly when he says, we need to shift our mindset from 'victim to creator'.

The Male Factor

At the beginning of his fertility journey it became obvious to Russell that there were differences between the way he and his wife were dealing with their situation. Whilst his wife was processing emotions Russell was not, instead filling his life with distractions like work.

The dichotomy between the male and female reaction is a typical one and can stem from the way males are programmed and shaped as Russell explains,

"As boys and men, we are bombarded with messages about what it means to be a man. This can come both unconsciously and consciously from our fathers buy also media and society as a whole".

'Manliness' is often measured in emotion - the expression of which was traditionally viewed as a weakness and it is this weakness which can have an adverse effect on the way that men react to fertility issues. It was only when Russell addressed his emotions things began to change, and change significantly;

"When I stopped trying to bury my emotions, when I was no longer scared of feeling them, I felt less of a victim of life. A few months after this realization and experience my wife got pregnant naturally against all odds".

The guide meets the rollercoaster head on; challenging us to examine and process our own emotions

One of the big differences between men and women is characterised by the way they view issues or problems; Davis thinks men are wired to find instant 'solutions' whereas women want to 'understand', before attempting to resolve. Put simply, men in general tend to want to 'run before they can walk' in emotional terms.

This theme runs throughout the guide and Russell provides some excellent insights and practical tips to enable men to shift this mindset.

An excellent Read

Russell succeeds in his desire to produce an 'experience'; it is a very personal and engaging read which will resonate with many and help many others.

"I wouldn't wish my 10 year fertility journey on anyone, but I hope you've got a glimpse of what I learned about myself and life that you can begin to see in your own life, and perhaps see the gifts for you on your journey that will stay with you forever and help you be the parent you would love to be"

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To download some free resources to help you further on your journey and get some inspiration straight to your inbox, sign up on Russell's website, thefertilemind.net

'Conceivable: Get off the infertility emotional rollercoaster and fast-track your journey to getting pregnant whether naturally or with IVF' by Russell Davis is available from Amazon