

# Family Planning 101: A Guide to Methods and Benefits



Obviously no one can predict what tomorrow will bring, and it's impossible to plan ahead for many of life's events. Most of the nearly [20% of couples](#) in the U.S. who struggle with infertility can attest to that.

Fortunately, for those who didn't predict their own infertility, couples and individuals are able to preemptively plan for their future family through assisted reproductive technologies (ART) and family planning methods offered through fertility clinics.

## Who Benefits from Family Planning

Family planning is especially beneficial for women whose biological clocks grow louder each day, or those who face cancer treatment that may affect their fertility. Men and women serving in the military can also benefit from planning for their future family. There are many other individuals and couples who, for personal or professional reasons, want to preserve their fertility with preemptive family planning.

Here we take a look at some of the methods available, thanks to ART and fertility preservation techniques.

## Cryopreservation

Through cryopreservation, it's possible to freeze eggs, sperm and even embryos until the time is right for you to start, or grow, a family. When you protect your fertility through cryopreservation, you have more control over the timing of your family as well as the health and viability of the eggs and sperm. Below are some examples of cryopreservation.

### Egg Freezing

Egg freezing, or oocyte cryopreservation, involves harvesting a woman's eggs and freezing them for use in IVF at a later date. As you no doubt are aware, women are born with all the eggs they'll ever have and those eggs become less viable and healthy as a woman ages. When you preserve your eggs in your 20s or even your early 30s, you afford yourself the opportunity to increase your odds for successful in vitro fertilization (IVF).

Egg freezing is beneficial in many circumstances: for women who aren't at a place in their lives where they want to start a family, for those who will undergo treatment for cancer or other illnesses that impact fertility, when there is a family history of premature menopause or ovarian insufficiency, when certain career risks can affect fertility.

### Sperm Freezing

[Freezing sperm](#) can also be beneficial to family planning. Sperm freezing occurs immediately after ejaculation and after analysis for viability (quantity, shape and movement). A reminder that, like eggs, sperm quality declines with age. For men approaching middle age who want to have children, freezing sperm is a way to help that happen.

Men who commonly freeze their sperm have testicular or prostate cancer, or are undergoing chemotherapy or other treatment for illness that causes a decline in sperm production. Those who work in hazardous worksites, or are serving in the military with exposure to heavy toxins, may also consider freezing their healthy sperm. While more rare, those who travel to areas with a high incidence of the Zika virus, which is communicable through sperm and causes severe birth defects, should also consider sperm cryopreservation.

### Embryo Freezing

When healthy eggs and sperm create more than a few healthy embryos, it's common to preserve and freeze those embryos for future use. For those who need to postpone their IVF, undergo cancer treatment or hormone therapy, embryo freezing is a great option.

It's important to note that egg, sperm or embryo cryopreservation does not guarantee a successful outcome, but it does offer some insurance for your future fertility. Cryogenically

preserving your fertility is an investment, and you'll want to speak with your doctor to determine if it's the right course for you.

## Genetic Testing and PGT

Couples may also want to undergo genetic testing before attempting a pregnancy, especially if there is a family history of certain birth defects for disease. In this case, you'll meet with a [genetic counselor](#) and undergo a series of tests to determine the likelihood of your future children having certain genetic conditions, including:

- Cystic Fibrosis
- Spinal Muscular Atrophy
- Tay Sachs
- Sickle Cell Disease
- Thalassemia
- Huntington's Disease

Preimplantation genetic testing (PGT), is available when you undergo an IVF cycle to determine the chromosomal health of your embryos and determine any genetic abnormalities (eg. Down syndrome and Turner syndrome). PGT is a personal choice, and should be discussed as an option with your physician.

## Gender Selection

Gender selection, or family balancing, is useful when there's a family history of gender-specific diseases or conditions like hemophilia. Gender selection may also be used when there is a specific desire to select the sex of your child.

## We're Here to Guide You

Whether you choose to grow your family today or in the future, family planning can help guide you. If you have any questions about family planning, contact your local specialist today. Their caring and compassionate team promises to find the best way for you to safeguard your fertility and your future family.