



### SURVIVING THE WAIT

We are acutely aware of and understand the extra stresses faced by those undertaking or about to start their assisted reproductive journey. The desire to start a family can happen well before the process actually begins. The waiting may feel intolerable at times and due to circumstances beyond your control the treatments may stop and start throughout the process.

The human brain can struggle with ambiguity, uncertainty and being in limbo. Unfortunately, that is exactly what you face at times during this process. It is unsettling. You may feel some fear and distress. Your mind could go to a negative place, for example “What if I’m never able to have children”? “When will this journey end for us?”

There is debate too, as often the Government defines assisted reproductive technologies as elective. This can therefore feel dismissive and confusing. It is hard to comprehend why having fertility treatment is considered an elective choice. It is totally normal to feel whatever you are feeling, whether that be frustration, loss, further grief, sadness, isolation and maybe anger as you wait for treatment and work towards the ultimate aim of having a family

Whilst many of you have existing survival tips and have no doubt used many of them before now, maybe these are some helpful reminders:

### TIPS TO COPE FROM OUR CLINICIANS

1 **Try to practice self-compassion**, you are going through a very stressful time. Try to remain curious and open about whatever feelings arise. You may feel anger at the unfairness about any delays or losses along the way. Many emotions arise during fertility treatment such as: fear, sadness, anxiety and /or constant worry – it can feel like a roller coaster. Treat yourself with empathy for whatever emotion you are feeling, for example

“It’s horrible to feel so overwhelmed and helpless” or “It’s understandable that I’m so upset because this is really important to me”.

- 2 **Try to reduce self-blame** and judgement. Hindsight bias is when we look back on the past and berate ourselves for not doing things differently. We assume that the younger version of us in years prior had all the information and perspective that we have today. However, the younger us did not know how the next few years could impact on our lives and treatment options. You never really know what lies ahead. You can only make the best decisions based on what information you have now. Therefore, try to reduce the self-criticism, and self-blame. The first step would be to notice when you are having highly critical thoughts or self blame for example “ah, that’s interesting, I’m blaming myself again”. Observing your thoughts is an important step. In the past, you may have had a negative thought and absorbed it as the truth. Now, you can observe the unhelpful thoughts and then choose to have a compassionate thought about yourself or the situation. A useful benchmark is, “How would I speak to a good friend?” If you would be more compassionate and understanding towards a friend, try to apply the same approach to yourself.
- 3 **Reach out to other people**. It may be hard for friends and family who have a child to truly understand what it is like to long for a baby and undergo fertility treatment. Therefore, you may find it helpful to chat on an online forum with other parents who are in a similar situation. Reading other people’s stories may help you feel less alone. However, it would be helpful to set some boundaries, such as not reading forums in the evening before bed. Give yourself time to wind down properly before sleep. →





- 4 **Understand that different people** have different ways of managing stress and coping with uncertainty. Some people like to vent as their way of processing ambiguity. Other people may compartmentalise and focus on things that they can control. If you are in a relationship and your partner has a different coping strategy, don't take it personally. It just reflects how he/she manages stress and it is probably something that they have done for years.
- 5 **Understand that relationships** can undergo a lot of stress during treatment. Everyone may be a bit more reactive or hypersensitive. You may not have the same level of resilience and patience. This can impact how we communicate and manage conflict. Try find some weekly catch up times with your partner and focus on the present together. Be clear about what each of you need over the next week and be respectful of different needs etc. The **Gottman Relationship Blog** has brief articles that explain some of the research on conflict resolution, such as The Four Horsemen (four negative ways of managing conflict that need to be avoided) [www.Gottman.com/blog/](http://www.Gottman.com/blog/)
- 6 **Seek help.** If you feel like your mood has deteriorated, your anxiety levels are too high, or you are not coping speak to your GP. You can get a referral to see one of the Clinicians at **Gidget Foundation Australia**. The sessions are done via face-to-face or Telehealth and are bulk billed. If your relationship is struggling, consider seeing someone who specialises in couples therapy. In addition, consider apps that may be helpful such as The **Resilience Project** or **Head Gear**.

A Gidget Foundation Australia client, who is a fertility specialist nurse, kindly shared these tips with us:

- If you experience any delays in treatment, see this as a time to focus on things you may have had to put off due to your focus being on IVF and trying to have a baby.
- Know that you are part of a community of people who are all in this waiting period with you – you are not alone! Connect with others as well as allowing some space for yourself.
- Talk to people about how you are feeling, no matter what is happening in the world, how you are feeling is important.
- Focus on what you can control. Only access reliable information, from your fertility specialists or trusted health professionals.
- If there is a wait time until treatment starts, use this time to work on your most 'healthy self' – ready for pregnancy. Practice more self-care.
- Continue taking prenatal vitamins.

Remember that self-care is more important than ever. Make time for adequate rest, eat well and try to have a little exercise everyday. Being selective with social media can help reduce fears or misinformation and boost your mood, rather than dampen it. It's okay to feel a bit low during your journey, it's normal and expected. Be patient and kind with yourself. 🌸

