



## Pain in IVF

### Is In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) painful?

Pain is a common symptom resulting from a medical condition or after surgery. In IVF, there are several areas where pain may be encountered, typically after procedures such as egg collection or embryo transfer. Pain may appear as abdominal pain or as a cramping sensation.

Every patient has different responses to IVF treatment. What may be considered painful to some, may only be minor discomfort for others. It is common for women who had undergone treatment to recall different experiences of discomfort to a similar procedure.

Generally, you should never be in extreme pain. Extreme pain may be a signal for complications. Pain associated with IVF are rare and can be treated effectively.



### Processes in IVF where pain might be encountered:

- Fertility Medication (injections and/or oral medication)

You may experience moderate discomfort when you have the hormone injections. If you are uncomfortable with doing the injections on your own, it can be helpful for your spouse to administer the injection for you. As hormone levels fluctuate and follicles grow in the ovaries, you may also experience cramps or bloated-ness, but these side effects are usually not severe.

- Egg collection

You will feel no pain during the procedure as anaesthesia is given. Recovery is swift after egg collection. However, you may experience mild side effects such as abdominal cramping, bloating or pressure after the procedure. You may be prescribed painkillers at the discretion of your doctor.



- Embryo Transfer

Embryo transfer is typically not painful and only causes mild discomfort similar to that of a pap smear. Most women are unable to feel the catheter, rather feel a form of 'pressure'. Recovery from transfer is very quick. You may experience occasional cramping during the two-week wait for a pregnancy test, but one should not associate these symptoms with the success or failure of embryo implantation.

### **Ways to communicate pain to the healthcare team**

A pain scale of 0-10 is a simple way of quantifying your pain so you can talk about it to your doctor or nurses. Typically, 0 means zero pain, one to three means mild pain, 4-7 moderate pain, and 8 and above severe pain. To better communicate the intensity of pain, you may also be asked questions such as "is your pain tolerable?".

Other ways to talk about your pain is describing how the pain might affect your function or by comparing it to the worst pain you've ever experienced.

### **Pain management**

Pain management comprises of different methods to reduce the pain that you may feel.

- Analgesics (or oral painkillers)

One method is through the use of analgesics to provide pain relief. In a fertility setting, it is important that the medication is safe and does not lead to unfavourable outcomes. The fertility doctor would advise and/or prescribe you medications that you can take during and after your IVF treatment.

- Home relief

Several simple steps you can take to provide relief and minimise pain are:

- Apply a warm towel (warm compress) on the area of discomfort and have plenty of rest
- Try breathing and relaxation techniques
- Stay hydrated and reduce intake of stimulants such as coffee, tea, or alcohol

If pain persists or increases in intensity, it should not be ignored as it could be a sign of other complications. Rather, seek medical attention as treatment may be needed.



### **Advancements in ART (assisted reproductive treatment) technology enables greater comfort for patients**

Current assisted reproductive treatment (ART) has benefited from advancement in technology and simplification of procedures. Hormone medications are more effective in eliciting similar responses compared to those available in the early days of ART. Moreover, different stimulation regimes are readily available with fewer stimulation days, which means fewer injections and reduced frequency in hormone medication intake, and thus reducing the occurrences of discomfort.

Surgical equipment associated with IVF such as egg collection needles are better manufactured to ease collection and minimise pain. Besides that, embryo transfer catheters are designed with greater reach and visibility under ultrasound, hence, reducing physician's reliance on excessive physical manipulation or other surgical tools.

All these contribute to a better experience with increased comfort for women during the IVF process.