Stress and Fertility: What’s the connection?

Have you felt frustrated or irritated when someone says, “Just relax, and you’ll get pregnant!” –Don’t we all wish it were this easy? Anyone who has experienced infertility knows can be stressful, but is the opposite true—can stress cause infertility?

Research suggests that psychological stress and fertility are connected, but we don’t fully understand how. Infertility can evoke a wide range of emotions ranging from sadness, depression and grief to anxiety or isolation. Research has shown that psychological counseling can be effective to reduce levels of anxiety and depression, increase coping, and improve quality of life. Can this reduction in stress lead to improvements in fertility?

Consider the following:

- Studies show that the #1 reason patients drop out of fertility therapy is not because they were discouraged by their physician, but rather because they said they couldn’t handle the stress.

- Research by Alice Domar, PhD, has consistently found that women who dramatically reduce their levels of stress through structured Mind/Body programs appear to have significantly higher rates of IVF success.

- In addition, data have consistently demonstrated that individuals or couples who participate in counseling find it to be of value—and allow them to be more in control of the process rather than the process controlling them.

At NRM, we have put together the following list of resources we hope will help you optimize your care. We want you to integrate whatever support group, counselor, Mind/Body Program, or book that you feel comfortable pursuing.

Online Mind/Body Program

A 10 week Mind/Body Program modeled after Dr. Alice Domar’s research designed to help individuals and/or couples cope with the physical and emotional impact of infertility by learning specific relaxation strategies and improving lifestyle habits. Email: onlinemindbody@uvm.edu

Counselor Options

1) Marlene Maron, PhD. Clinical Psychologist. University of Vermont. Phone: (802) 847-3634
2) Jessica Clifton. Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology. The Clinical Psychology Internship Program. Burlington, Vermont. (802)656-2661
3) Kate Stone, PsyD. University of Vermont. Burlington, Vermont. (802) 847-3634
4) Susan Donnis, Licensed Psychologist-Masters. Burlington, Vermont. (802) 862-2334
5) Judith Gerber, PhD. Clinical Psychologist in Family Medicine, Colchester, Vermont. Phone: (802) 847-2055
6) Lindsay Jernigan, PhD. Individual, couples, and sex therapy. Eastern View Integrative Medicine. South Burlington (802) 229-8270

There are many therapists in this community—it is okay to meet more than one so that you can find one that is right for you!

**Support Circles/Groups**

- Women’s Wellness Series: Yoga for Fertility with Beth Kruger. [www.prenatalmethod.com](http://www.prenatalmethod.com)
- Resolve New England: puts together support groups throughout New England. Check their website [www.resolvenewengland.org/support](http://www.resolvenewengland.org/support) for upcoming locations and meeting times. The Vermont group is in development!

**Books:**


If you are looking for humor: