

Fertility & Family Planning

to
My
Soul



06

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ENGAGE
ESGQ | European Network of Gynaecological
Cancer Advocacy Groups

**Support and
guide women in
understanding
the impact of
gynaecological
cancer treatments
on fertility and in
exploring options
for family planning
during and after
treatment.**

01



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF CANCER TREATMENT ON FERTILITY

Cancer treatments can bring **many changes to your body**, and it's natural to feel uncertain or worried about how they might affect your fertility.

The impact of treatment varies for each person, depending on the type of treatment, the area being treated, and your overall health. Some treatments, like chemotherapy and radiation, especially when focused on the pelvic area, can occasionally harm eggs or disrupt ovarian function, which may affect your ability to conceive. Surgery, such as the removal of the uterus or ovaries, can also have an impact on your ability to carry a pregnancy. However, in some situations, measures can be taken that may help preserve fertility, which is why it's so important to discuss your options with your medical team.

Can I still become a mum?

While these possibilities might feel overwhelming, please know that many women maintain their fertility after treatment, especially with careful planning and support. Your pathway is unique, and your healthcare team is here to help you understand the personal risks, answer your questions, and explore options that align with your hopes and dreams. You don't have to navigate this alone—there is help every step of the way.

There are many options!

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OPTIONS FOR FERTILITY PRESERVATION



02

IF GROWING YOUR FAMILY IN THE FUTURE IS SOMETHING YOU HOPE TO DO, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW THAT NOT ALL CANCER TREATMENTS AFFECT FERTILITY. EVERY TREATMENT PLAN AND EXPERIENCE IS UNIQUE, AND MANY WOMEN FIND THAT THEIR FERTILITY REMAINS UNCHANGED.

HOWEVER, IF THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THAT YOUR TREATMENT WILL IMPACT FERTILITY, THERE ARE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE BEFOREHAND TO HELP PRESERVE YOUR OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE. PLEASE NOTE THAT AVAILABILITY OF THESE OPTIONS MAY VARY DEPENDING ON THE COUNTRY OR TREATMENT CENTRE.

Egg or Embryo Freezing

This involves a short period of hormonal stimulation to collect mature eggs. These eggs can either be frozen as they are or fertilized with sperm to create embryos that are stored for future use.

Ovarian Transposition

If you need to undergo radiotherapy of the pelvis, your ovaries can be released from the uterus via minimally invasive surgery and fixed outside the radiation field in order to avoid radiation-induced damage.

Ovarian Tissue Freezing

A portion of your ovary is surgically removed and frozen. This tissue can be reimplanted after treatment to restore ovarian function and — potentially — fertility.

Hormonal Suppression During Chemotherapy

Medications can temporarily suppress ovarian function during chemotherapy, reducing the risk of long-term harm to your fertility. It is possible that the stage of your cervical cancer allows for a so-called trachelectomy surgery, during which the uterus is preserved and only the cervix is removed. This procedure may enable you to carry your own child in the future. However, becoming pregnant and maintaining the pregnancy might be more challenging — requiring patience, resilience, and mutual support from both you and your partner.

Ovarian Shielding (Radiation Protection)

If you're undergoing radiation therapy, your medical team can use shielding techniques to protect your ovaries from exposure and minimize potential damage.

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Fertility preservation is not only for women who are ready to start a family now — it matters just as much for those who are young, single, or unsure about what the future may bring. You may not have a partner today, but that does not make your hopes for a family any less real or important. Facing cancer can feel like so much is being decided on your behalf, but this is one area where you can still have a voice and protect what matters to you.

If the idea of having children one day is meaningful to you, it is okay to ask about your options, even if the timing feels uncertain. Being single doesn't close the door to parenthood. Many women go on to start families through assisted reproduction when the time is right. Your dreams are valid, your choices matter, and you deserve the chance to keep those possibilities open.

Explore the possibilities

IT IS ALSO COMPLETELY NATURAL TO FEEL A MIX OF EMOTIONS WHEN THINKING ABOUT THESE DECISIONS, AND YOU MAY FEEL UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU. REMEMBER, YOU DON'T HAVE TO NAVIGATE THIS ALONE. FERTILITY SPECIALISTS ARE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND COMPASSIONATE SUPPORT, HELPING YOU EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKE CHOICES THAT FEEL RIGHT FOR YOUR FUTURE. IN SOME PLACES, FERTILITY PRESERVATION MAY NOT YET BE PART OF STANDARD CARE, AND NOT ALL HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS MAY BRING UP THE TOPIC, SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO FEEL EMPOWERED TO ASK YOUR ONCOLOGIST DIRECTLY. THERE IS NO "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL" SOLUTION — WHAT MATTERS MOST IS WHAT FEELS RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR UNIQUE PATHWAY.

03

ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO BUILD A FAMILY



Sometimes, cancer treatment can make it difficult or even impossible to conceive naturally. Coming to terms with this can be deeply emotional, and it's okay to feel sadness or grief over this **unexpected** challenge. These feelings are **valid** and deserve **space** to be acknowledged.

If this becomes part of your pathway, it's important to remember that there are still many meaningful and fulfilling paths to parenthood. Adoption, surrogacy (even though this option may not be available or legal in every country), or using donor eggs or embryos are all wonderful alternatives to grow your family. These options may not have been part of your original plan, and even though they can allow for the same opportunity for love, joy, and connection, it's okay to take time to process and grieve the change. For some, exploring these alternatives may also bring up complex emotions due to personal, ethical, or religious beliefs, which can add another layer of stress. There may also be financial concerns. It's important to give yourself compassion as you navigate these decisions — and to seek support from trusted people or professionals who respect your values.



Give yourself permission to take the time you need to process these possibilities.

Grieving the loss of one path doesn't diminish the beauty or potential of another. For many women, this grief can feel especially isolating — because it's often invisible. Unlike physical wounds, the absence of fertility isn't always something others can see or fully understand. You may find yourself mourning something deeply personal and unseen, and that kind of internal loss can feel particularly heavy. Naming this invisible grief may not take the pain away, but it can be a powerful step toward feeling acknowledged, understood, and less alone.

Remember, family is built through love, care, and connection — not just biology. Many women who have walked a similar path have found immense happiness and fulfilment with these alternative options. You, too, deserve to find a way forward that feels right for you, your heart, and your future.

And if your path doesn't include parenting, that is equally valid and complete. Many women find deep purpose and fulfilment through nurturing in other ways, such as mentoring, volunteering, supporting others, or creating meaningful contributions in their communities. What matters most is honouring what brings you joy and connection.

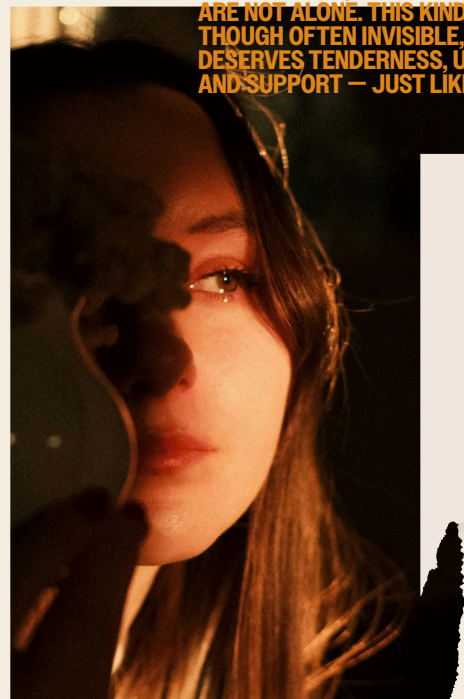
COPING WITH EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Thinking about fertility during cancer treatment can stir up a range of emotions, including grief, sadness, fear, and even anger. These feelings are natural and deeply valid. It's important to give yourself the space and permission to feel fully. You are allowed to grieve what you may lose, and you are also allowed to hold on to hope for what may still be possible.

FOR SOME WOMEN, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO UNDERGO THE REMOVAL OF REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS LIKE THE UTERUS OR OVARIES, THERE CAN BE AN ADDED LAYER OF EMOTIONAL COMPLEXITY. THESE PARTS OF THE BODY ARE OFTEN DEEPLY CONNECTED TO A WOMAN'S SENSE OF SELF — HER IDENTITY, HER FEMININITY, HER VISION OF THE FUTURE. WHEN THEY ARE NO LONGER THERE, IT CAN LEAVE A QUIET BUT DEEPLY FELT ACHE, ONE THAT OTHERS MAY NOT SEE OR UNDERSTAND. NOT EVERYONE WILL FEEL THIS WAY, AND THAT'S OKAY. BUT IF YOU DO FIND YOURSELF GRIEVING, FEELING A SENSE OF LOSS OR DISCONNECTION, OR NOTICING A SHIFT IN HOW YOU RELATE TO YOUR BODY, PLEASE KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. THIS KIND OF GRIEF, THOUGH OFTEN INVISIBLE, IS REAL. AND IT DESERVES TENDERNESS, UNDERSTANDING, AND SUPPORT — JUST LIKE YOU DO.

SHARING YOUR EMOTIONS CAN HELP EASE THE WEIGHT YOU'RE CARRYING. SPEAKING WITH A COUNSELLOR OR THERAPIST WHO UNDERSTANDS THE COMPLEXITIES OF CANCER AND FERTILITY CAN PROVIDE VALUABLE SUPPORT. CONNECTING WITH OTHER WOMEN WHO HAVE FACED SIMILAR CHALLENGES MAY ALSO BRING COMFORT AND STRENGTH. KNOWING THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

to My Soul



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ABOVE ALL, BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF. FERTILITY IS ONE PART OF YOUR STORY, BUT IT DOES NOT DEFINE WHO YOU ARE OR YOUR WORTH. YOU ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN THIS MOMENT, AND HEALING — BOTH EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL — TAKES TIME. TRUST IN YOUR RESILIENCE AND REMEMBER THAT IT'S OKAY TO TAKE THIS PATH ONE STEP AT A TIME.

let's talk



Taking practical steps to address your fertility and family planning concerns is a **powerful way** to regain a sense of control during a time that may feel uncertain. As you navigate this pathway, it's also important to acknowledge your emotional and physical strength.

Start the Conversation Early

Cancer treatment decisions often need to be made quickly, and this urgency can sometimes make it challenging to fully explore fertility preservation options without delaying treatment. In some cases, any delay could potentially affect the success of treatment. That is why it's essential to talk to your medical team as early as possible (preferably before treatment starts.). They can help you weigh the benefits and risks — and guide you in making a decision that prioritizes both your health and your future hopes.

Lean on Your Support System

Share your feelings and decisions with trusted loved ones. Opening up to a partner, friend, or family member can help lighten the emotional load.

Prioritize Self-Care

Take time for yourself in whatever ways feels most nurturing, whether it's journaling, practicing mindfulness, or simply resting when you need to recharge.

Prepare for Appointments

Write down your questions, concerns, or thoughts beforehand to help you feel organized and confident during discussions with your medical team.

Look into Financial Resources

Fertility preservation can be expensive, but there are programs and organizations that offer financial support. Don't hesitate to ask your doctor or specialist for recommendations.

THIS PATH MAY LOOK DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU ONCE ENVISIONED, BUT IT IS STILL YOURS TO SHAPE. EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE IS A STEP TOWARD BUILDING A FUTURE THAT REFLECTS YOUR HOPES, VALUES, AND RESILIENCE. ALLOW YOURSELF THE GRACE TO EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS AND THE COURAGE TO EMBRACE NEW POSSIBILITIES.



Affirmations

I am strong and capable of navigating this path, no matter how uncertain it feels.

It's okay to grieve, and it's okay to hope for the future.

My worth is not defined by my fertility, but by who I am as a whole person.

There are many ways to build a family, and I will find the one that's right for me.

I am deserving of love, connection, and support through every step of this pathway.

My path may be different, but it is still full of possibilities and hope.

Every step I take is leading me toward a meaningful and fulfilling future.

I am allowed to create new dreams and embrace new possibilities.

This moment does not define me; I am so much more than this chapter of my life.

The love I give and receive is what truly defines my family and my future.