

The Egg Donor Experience

Step One: Hormone Stimulation

A woman normally develops and releases one egg per month, a process regulated by hormones secreted by the pituitary gland. In an egg donation cycle, you receive an injection to suppress secretion of your own pituitary hormones. After about 15 days, you will begin daily injections of hormonal medication(s), similar to those produced by your body during a menstrual cycle. Taken over a period of approximately two weeks, these drugs stimulate your ovaries to develop multiple follicles containing eggs. Hormone stimulation increases the chances for success in a donor egg cycle by increasing the number of oocytes available for fertilization and replacement, as embryos, to the recipient. In most cases, you produce enough eggs for two recipient couples.

While you are taking these drugs, the recipient's hormones also are suppressed with medication to regulate her cycle and keep her from producing her own follicles and eggs. While your oocytes are developing, the recipient is taking estrogen to thicken the lining of her uterus. When your eggs are ready, you receive an additional injection timing the release of the eggs. At the same time, the recipient starts additional medications, including intramuscular progesterone injections, to prepare her body for embryo transfer and implantation.

Step Two: Cycle Monitoring

You are monitored carefully, through ultrasound examinations and blood tests, to determine your response to the stimulation drugs. While you are receiving these medications, you will be scheduled for almost daily morning visits to a local office. This also allows them to closely track the development of the follicles containing your eggs. When they have matured, an injection triggers the final ripening process.

Step Three: Egg Retrieval

Approximately 35 hours after you have received the final injection, you are scheduled for egg retrieval. You are sedated and monitored by an anesthesiologist, while one of our physicians uses an ultrasound probe to visualize your follicles. In a process that lasts approximately twenty minutes, a specialized needle is inserted through your vaginal wall, reaching the follicles and drawing out the fluid containing the oocytes. During the procedure, you are completely asleep. The eggs are transferred immediately to the embryology laboratory and you are brought to the recovery room. You cannot take yourself home after the procedure, you must have someone pick you up and escort you home.

You will spend about an hour in recovery before being released to someone who can escort you home, where you must rest for the remainder of the day. The donation process is completed with a follow-up exam two weeks later.