

# Thinking about using sperm or eggs from a third party donor?

## Assisted Human Reproduction

### What I need to know

Many Canadians undergo assisted human reproduction (AHR) procedures such as *in vitro* fertilization using their own sperm or eggs, also known as gametes. Sometimes, however, the best or only chance of achieving pregnancy requires the use of gametes that are donated by a third party.

A third party donor is a person who provides gametes for reproductive use either to a recipient that they know such as a friend, or to someone unknown to them. You will likely receive medical history about your donor; however their identity may be protected if you choose a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

This brochure provides information about some of the considerations around using donated gametes that may apply to you, your spouse or partner, and any children who are born as a result of the donation.

### Why would I consider using donor sperm or eggs?

The most common reasons for using third party gametes include:

- You are unable to achieve a pregnancy using your own sperm or eggs due to infertility or some other physical condition of you or your spouse or partner;
- Donor gamete(s) or embryo are needed in order to build your family;
- There is a known genetically inherited condition that you wish to avoid passing on to your children.

### What should I know about third party donation?

Being accepted as a sperm donor by a reproductive clinic or centre requires that the donor undergo health screening and testing and provide an accurate medical history<sup>1</sup>. Based on this information a determination is made as to whether that person qualifies as a donor. Egg donation is more complex and personally demanding than sperm donation as it involves a medical intervention that requires fertility medications first to stimulate the ovaries of the donor, followed by a surgical procedure to retrieve the eggs at the

appropriate time. As with all medications and medical procedures, the intended donor should discuss the process and specific health issues and risks with a physician prior to making a decision.

### What issues should I consider?

In choosing to build your family through third party donation, it is important that you consider issues such as the following:

#### Emotional reactions

There are many emotions unique to the experience of considering the use of third party gametes to build your family. If you are the partner whose gametes are not being used, you may feel a sense of loss or sadness about not having a genetic link with your child. These feelings may be compounded by guilt or a sense that you have disappointed your spouse or partner. Although issues with fertility affect both women and men, it is women who report greater physical and psychosocial symptoms of stress. It is best to recognize, discuss and resolve these emotional reactions before proceeding with AHR.

#### Decision-making challenges

Contemplating the use of donated sperm or eggs may be one of the most difficult decisions you will make. If you have a spouse or partner that is not as comfortable with this option, or if you feel pressured to agree to it in order to please someone else, caution is advised. Such pressures might later lead to regrets and could have a negative impact on your relationship with your spouse or partner and any resulting child(ren).

#### Implications for couples

For a spouse or partner who will not have a genetic link, there may be additional anxiety about parenting including fears about being unable to establish an emotional attachment to a child, or concerns about how a child will respond to knowing donor gametes were involved in their conception. Such feelings may be different depending upon whether you are the recipient of donor sperm or eggs, or are the spouse or partner of someone receiving them.

#### Telling your child

How and when you will tell your child about their genetic background is a very personal decision. Building upon what is known in the area of adoption, most professionals recommend that children be told from a young age their birth origins so that it can become part of their identity as they grow and mature. Experience shows that children who learn about their background

at a young age adapt well, and are more likely to develop a positive self-concept. If you have told others about your AHR experience, but do not intend to tell your child, there is a significant risk that your child will find out from someone else. For a child, this revelation may undermine their sense of trust within the family. Also, some children who are not told details of their conception may come to suspect that there is a missing piece of information about their genetic origin.

#### Telling others

The approach you take to disclosure of donation details will depend on many factors including your comfort level about sharing information. You may choose to discuss your decision with family and friends prior to undergoing AHR, or you may do so only after achieving a pregnancy or after birth. Keep in mind that as soon as your baby is born, friends or family members may comment on their level of physical resemblance to you or to other family members.

#### Using a known donor

If you are receiving a donation from someone you know, it is important to explore your expectations of the altruistic donation to make sure you agree about issues such as how many times they will donate; and how (or if) you will share information with others, especially children that are born from the donation. You may discuss whether the genetic link to the donor will impact the role they play or expect to play in your family.

#### Legal issues

Your province or territory may have specific laws concerning the rights and responsibilities of parties involved in third party donation. In all cases, you should consider seeking independent legal advice. Your reproductive clinic or centre may also be able to provide guidance on this issue.

### Where can I find information and support?

Choosing to use gametes from a third party donor is a complex decision with many psychosocial implications. Counselling with a professional such as a psychologist or social worker with experience in donor conception issues can be an invaluable source of support, information and guidance as you explore the specific implications of third party donation for you, your spouse or partner and for your future child(ren). Counsellors will be able to assist you in accessing resources such as support networks and specialized books for you as parents, including those that help you to positively share with your children their 'family story'.

### Resources

#### Assisted Human Reproduction Canada (AHRC)

[www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca](http://www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca)

Phone (toll free): 1-866-467-1853

Email: [info.ahrc-pac@hc-sc.gc.ca](mailto:info.ahrc-pac@hc-sc.gc.ca)

Counselling and Assisted Human Reproduction: A Guide for Patients

[www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/counselling-counseling-eng.php](http://www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/counselling-counseling-eng.php)

Thinking About Using Assisted Human Reproduction?

[www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php](http://www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php)

Thinking About Donating Sperm or Eggs to a Third Party?

[www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php](http://www.ahrc-pac.gc.ca/v2/pubs/index-eng.php)

#### Infertility Awareness Association of Canada (IAAC)

[www.iaac.ca](http://www.iaac.ca)

Phone: 514-484-2891

Email: [info@iaac.ca](mailto:info@iaac.ca)

#### Infertility Network (Canada)

[www.infertilitynetwork.org](http://www.infertilitynetwork.org)

Phone: 416-691-3611

Email: [info@InfertilityNetwork.org](mailto:info@InfertilityNetwork.org)

#### LGBTQ Parenting Network Canada

[www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca](http://www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca)

Phone: 416-324-4100 ext. 5219

Email: [parentingnetwork@sherbourne.on.ca](mailto:parentingnetwork@sherbourne.on.ca)

<sup>1</sup> Health Canada, **Guidance on the Processing and Distribution of Semen for Assisted Conception Regulations**, [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/compli-conform/info-prod/don/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dhp-mps/compli-conform/info-prod/don/index-eng.php)