Infertility Myths: Setting the record straight

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Infertility is a magnet for myths and misunderstandings—perhaps because it’s an emotional subject that people have begun to openly discuss only recently. This article debunks six common myths associated with fertility problems.

1. **It’s easy to get pregnant.** Each cycle, couples who are trying to conceive, have a window of opportunity in which to conceive. The egg survives for only 12 – 24 hours after ovulation. To get pregnant, the couple must have intercourse either shortly before or during ovulation. The bottom line: Couples who are trying to conceive have—at most—a one-in-five chance of getting pregnant each cycle.

2. **Everyone should try to conceive for a year before seeking medical help.** For most couples, infertility is defined as having tried unsuccessfully to conceive for 12 months. But many experts recommend that women 35 or older see an infertility specialist after six months. Why? A woman’s fertility decreases significantly after age 35. A woman that age who tries for 12 months to conceive before seeking help might be wasting valuable time.

3. **Infertility is primarily a woman’s problem.** The source of a fertility problem is as likely to be traced to the man’s reproductive system as it is to the woman’s. Possible causes of infertility in men include too few sperm or too few normal sperm, not enough semen, semen that’s too thick and blockages in the tubes through which sperm travel. All those conditions make it difficult for sperm to successfully complete the long swim to the fallopian tube, where fertilization takes place.

4. **Infertility treatment is always complicated and expensive.** Fertility problems in men can be caused by using drugs, including prescription medications as well as marijuana, alcohol consumption and smoking cigarettes. Changing behaviors and medications can frequently increase a man’s sperm count and resolve an infertility problem.

   Easy-to-take drugs can correct several hormonal problems that interfere with fertility in women. For example, in about 25 percent of couples that have fertility problems, the woman is not ovulating. The drug clomiphene is used to stimulate ovulation and many women who take it get pregnant.
5. **Stress can cause infertility.** Severe stress can interfere with ovulation or depress sperm production. But both situations are rare. Although it’s rumored that pregnancy rates are higher after adoption because couples have stopped worrying about getting pregnant, studies show that this is not the case. Regardless of whether they choose to adopt, a certain number of couples that thought they were infertile will conceive after an extended period of time. Of course, stress or extensive work commitments can indirectly affect fertility if they keep couples from having frequent intercourse.

6. **There’s nothing you can do to prevent infertility.** Many people do not realize it, but sexually transmitted diseases can lead to infertility. Infections caused by chlamydia and gonorrhea, which starts in the vagina, can work their way up to the cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. This condition, called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), causes scarring and other damage to a woman’s reproductive organs that can interfere with fertility. You can reduce your risk of PID—and of infertility—by being monogamous with a partner who is also monogamous and by using condoms.

Seeking medical care promptly for any gynecologic or urologic problems can also help protect fertility.

For appointments, referrals or more information, please contact MCG Reproductive Medicine and Infertility Associates at (706) 722-4434.