

Ending embryo storage



Fertility Facts

Deciding what to do about stored embryos when you have finished your family, or when your circumstances change, may not be easy. Here our counsellors explore this issue.

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Having to make a decision to cease storage of your embryos may not be something you considered fully when beginning your IVF treatment. You may have felt for some time now that your family is complete, or perhaps your circumstances have changed and you cannot try for another baby. The regular letter from Fertility Associates regarding your stored embryos may have become an unpleasant reminder of a decision you have been putting off.

Even when the reasons to discontinue storage are clear-cut and logical, the decision may still come with some unanticipated emotions of anxiety and grief. This step may follow years of effort, cost and visits to the clinic and you may have children born as a result. Seeing those children may make this decision more difficult as you have had a glimpse of the potential in your embryos.

What are the choices?

Thawing the embryos with no intent to try for a pregnancy

After we have received your directions on the form you have been sent, an embryologist will thaw the embryos and allow them to succumb. The embryologist may dispose of the embryos at this stage or you may prefer to collect them yourself. If returned to you, the embryos will be in some clear fluid in a small, plastic test tube. They will barely be visible except under a microscope.

Occasionally people prefer to return the embryos to their body without wishing to conceive. Please discuss this option with your doctor, counsellor or embryologist if this is the most suitable plan for you.



Donation of your embryos to others needing fertility treatment

In New Zealand, you may donate embryos to only one couple or individual. You may already know someone who might need them or alternatively you can select these people from a written profile and meet with them prior to donating. Guidelines do not permit donation of embryos if you have used an egg or sperm donor.

If you are considering donating your embryos please request further information about what is involved in this process.

Can I gift my embryos to medical science?

From overseas studies we know that many people, who are uncomfortable with the thought of donating their embryos to another family, would prefer to donate them to medical research so as to feel that their precious embryos are not wasted. Current New Zealand guidelines do not permit

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donation of viable embryos to medical research. Although this may be an option in the future, we do not expect it to become available in the near future.

Acknowledging the decision

Reaching a point where you want to move on from fertility treatment is an important step. If you now wish to complete your contact with the clinic by releasing or reclaiming your embryos from storage, you may want to take time to acknowledge this step in a significant way.

If they have chosen to collect their embryos, some people have found it appropriate to return the embryos to the ground and have what may be seen as a burial, with a few words spoken, a poem, the planting of a tree or placement of a garden sculpture or stone. A similar ceremony can still be held even if you prefer not to have the embryos returned to you.

There are a huge range of possibilities and you are welcome to contact the clinic counsellors to help you discover what might be appropriate for you. You may also want to talk to the counsellors as you deal with the reality of being at this point in your journey.

Phone your clinic to arrange an appointment with a counsellor or to request an email address to contact a counsellor by email.

A useful reference is the book: *“Be Fertile With Your Infertility”* by Christine Bannan and Winnie Duggan, available at clinic reception or through the counsellors.

