



# Surrogacy International, Inc.

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## THE IVF PROCESS:

### **An Overview:**

The most commonly used forms of assisted reproduction are artificial insemination and In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF). Simply put, artificial insemination involves medically supervised transmission of sperm into the intended mother's or surrogate's vagina. It more closely resembles a natural reproduction process. The hope of course is that the sperm will fertilize the ova (eggs) and a positive pregnancy will result. Many couples and single intended mothers try this route first.

IVF, however, is an additional option. The reproductive technology is more precise and allows for a wider range of infertile couples and individuals to fulfill their dreams of parenthood. Unlike artificial fertilization, eggs and sperm are medically combined together outside of the woman's uterus (womb) in a special fertility lab, hence the old term "test tube baby." This direct contact between sperm and eggs increases the likelihood of a fertilized egg (or embryo). The embryo is then transferred to a woman's uterus (womb) where it follows the natural process of pregnancy to becoming a baby. Since the egg and sperm are fertilized outside of the uterus, infertile couples and individuals can use donors and surrogates, making it truly possible for almost all couples and individuals to begin their families.

### **Step-By-Step Process:**

**STEP 1: (Preparation Phase)** Often the intended mother, surrogate and/or egg donor will begin oral contraceptives (birth control). This helps to regulate menstrual cycles, putting the women's cycles into sync with one another.

**STEP 2: (Ovulation Suppression)** Different medical methods are used to help ensure that the eggs are not released from the ovaries before they are ready to be retrieved. This is known as premature ovulation. Ovarian ultrasounds and blood tests may be performed at this time to confirm successful ovulation suppression and to monitor follicle maturation. Each follicle contains one immature egg.

**Step 3: (Ovarian Stimulation)** Typically only one follicle, containing one egg, matures and is released from an ovary during a woman's menstrual cycle. To increase fertilization success rates, however, the ovary must be stimulated to mature multiple follicles and, therefore, release multiple eggs for retrieval. Ten to fifteen eggs are usually desired. A number of different medication regimens may be used during this process. Ultrasounds and blood tests may be performed at this time to monitor follicle development.

**Step 4: (Egg Maturation)** Usually 2-3 days before the expected date of egg retrieval, an injection of Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG), the "pregnancy hormone," is given. This hormone finalizes the maturation of the eggs. The timing of this injection is very important and a fertility specialist will monitor development closely.

**Step 5: (Egg Retrieval)** Under a light sedative, the eggs are extracted vaginally from the egg donor or intended mother using a specialized vaginal needle. The process is quick. Women often have typical menstrual symptoms such as vaginal bleeding and cramping. Most women are able to return home promptly after the procedure and can return to normal daily functions within 24 to 48 hours.

**Step 6: (Fertilization)** Following retrieval, 50,000 to 100,000 sperm are combined with the eggs in a specialized lab dish. This is called insemination. Within 24 hours, the eggs will be assessed for successful fertilization by the sperm. The fertilized egg is then referred to as the embryo. For the next 48 hours, the embryo is monitored closely for proper development.

**Step 7: (Embryo Transfer)** Typically 3-5 days following fertilization, the embryo(s) are transferred to the intended mother's or surrogate mother's uterus. The procedure is rather simple and requires no sedative. Often at this time, the woman will begin hormone supplements to help support the pregnancy and make sure that the embryo can properly attach itself to the uterine wall. These supplements usually continue for a number of weeks.

**Step 8: (Pregnancy Confirmation)** Within 2 weeks following the embryo transfer, a blood sample is taken to confirm a successful pregnancy.

**Step 9: (The Pregnancy)** Continued monitoring and support will be provided to all parties throughout the pregnancy process.

**Step 10: (Birth)** A child is born and a new family has begun!