

Planning ahead for Christmas and special celebrations



Fertility New Zealand is a registered charity supporting people with fertility issues

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The isolating and painful experience of infertility can turn Christmas into a time of sadness. The season itself is founded on the celebration of a special birth in history. It is traditionally a time focused on families and children. For infertile people it becomes yet another reminder of a longed for child, or of a child lost.

For many, it is the thought of facing all the relatives that makes Christmas so trying. How can you best handle the people with all the intrusive questions and the ones with all the children around them? Who needs to know of your difficulties in conceiving? Who will give you appropriate support? How do you say it, anyway?

Some people tell no one, others carefully select some close friends and relatives who they trust, and yet others tell almost anyone who is interested. When you do decide to tell others, it helps to be clear about what support you would like them to give you. You may prefer to be the one who makes the contact when you feel in need of support, rather than cope with well-meaning concern from others at a time that is not right for you.

Many people have shared ideas and tips that have helped them over the 'Holiday Hurdle' – not only at Christmas, but also on other poignant celebrations such as Mother's Day and Father's Day. Some of these strategies may appeal to you.

Choose to:

- See your parents and other family members a week or two beforehand so they know you care about them. This will leave you free to spend the day quietly.
- Decide which events you feel comfortable attending and which you would rather avoid, especially the ones at which you know there will be a lot of children or pregnant women. Remember that you don't have to accept every invitation.
- If you do decide to attend events that may be difficult, stay only as long as you feel comfortable. Don't say that you will stay for the whole day, but rather that you will come.

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Perhaps arriving and leaving at different times will help you avoid the most painful aspects of the gathering.

- If people know what you are experiencing, it may help to explain that you find this time of year difficult so that they understand why you may not want to participate fully.
- Spend some time with others who also don't have children.
- Set up another time over the festive season that you can enjoy and perhaps to which only adults are invited.
- Attend a late Christmas Eve church service rather than the family service on Christmas Day.
- Think about getting right away from it all, possibly spending a couple of days in the back of beyond in a tent, or planning your annual holiday for this time. You can make a conscious choice not to celebrate Christmas in the traditional way, or even to not celebrate it at all.
- Make it special for you. Old family traditions may not fulfil your present needs. You may be able to develop new traditions and rituals that are meaningful for you and allow you to celebrate special occasions with pleasure.
- Spend time with your partner, sharing how it feels for you both at this time. Allow yourself to acknowledge the sadness, emptiness and loss that you experience with infertility. Recognise the hurdles that you have overcome together. ►

- ◀ If you are single, involve your key support person (or people) in the challenges you are likely to face over this time and let them know how you'd like them to help you.
- Appreciate the friends and family members who have supported you through the year – and tell them so! Stay in touch with other infertile friends. They are in the same boat and can understand and offer the support that perhaps your family cannot.
- Handle the Christmas feasting in ways that feel comfortable for you. When you are trying to keep your weight down and your fertility up, Christmas may be particularly difficult. Likewise the free-flowing alcohol, the rich coffees and even the sugary or caffeinated soft drinks can lower fertility and work against your goal of being in the best shape for treatment in the New Year. Decide beforehand what you would like your intake to be, but remember to allow yourself some treats and 'days off' too.
- On Mother's Day and Father's Day you may like to give your partner a small memento to recognise their commitment to becoming a parent. If you are single, be kind to yourself on this day.

Choose not to:

- Pretend that there is nothing wrong and carry on with 'business as usual'.
- Forget that you need each other, especially during these difficult days.
- Be caught off guard by unexpected or embarrassing questions about your plans for having a family
- Feel that you have to disclose all the intimate details of your situation.
- Expect others to understand your pain. Refer to it briefly and ask that they support you by respecting your choices.
- Shop at large shopping centres with Santas and hordes of excited children. Try smaller shops or shop online if you find it difficult to face the constant holiday cheer.



- Feel guilty about not participating in all the traditional family celebrations.
- Deprive yourself of all chance of having fun.

Holidays can be stressful, even in the best of circumstances. By planning in advance and acknowledging that some days may be difficult, you can prepare yourself and improve your chances of having some fun and enjoying the opportunities that the holiday season can bring your way.

Spend time doing the things you really enjoy: preparing a spectacular meal, soaking in a bubble bath, walking on the beach, or just curling up with a good book. You've had a difficult year and you deserve to pamper yourselves.

For families and friends

- Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day and other family-centred celebrations can be difficult times for people experiencing infertility. Holidays may be painful reminders of their longed-for child and of the fertility and success of others. Birthdays can be another difficult day as not

only do they remind you of your own birth but also being unable to celebrate a child's birthday. Your understanding and support will be appreciated by your family member or friend.

- Your friend or family member may prefer to spend Christmas or other special days alone. Don't feel rejected. Let them know that you would like to see them, but will understand if they do not feel able to attend. They love you and don't want to spoil your celebrations with their sadness.
- Don't feel that you need to 'fix' things for them. You can't. The pain of infertility will not magically disappear. Just being there when they ask you, will be comforting
- Allow them to be sad and upset when they need to be.
- A card letting them know you are thinking of them may be appropriate.
- Acknowledge privately that this is a difficult time. Don't pretend that nothing is wrong. ■

Please note that the information presented in this brochure is intended only as a brief summary. For specific advice on your particular medical situation you should always consult your professional health care provider.
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