

Hypnosis may boost in vitro fertilization success

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Women who are hypnotized before undergoing the transfer of an embryo created by in vitro fertilization (IVF) may be more likely to become pregnant, Israeli researchers report.

Dr. Eliahu Levitas of Soroka University Medical Center in Beer Sheva and colleagues found that nearly 60 percent of a group of women who were hypnotized during the procedure became pregnant, versus about 30 percent of a group of women who weren't hypnotized.

Many infertility experts see the transfer of an embryo to a woman's uterus as a key event that determines whether IVF will succeed, the researchers report in the journal *Fertility and Sterility*. Women may be stressed during embryo transfer from fears that the treatment will fail, they explain, or that the transfer will be painful.

Hypnosis has been shown to be helpful in reducing patients' stress during many types of surgical procedures and can also reduce pain during and after surgery. To investigate if this technique might help IVF patients, the researchers assigned 89 couples that underwent 98 treatment cycles to hypnosis, and compared the outcome to that of 96 couples who underwent 96 cycles and were not hypnotized.

Women in the hypnosis group met with a physician certified in hypnosis, who asked them to select a "very pleasant" past experience to think of during embryo transfer. Patients were hypnotized before the transfer, and told to compare the procedure "with the reception of long-awaited and very welcome guests." After the woman was in a trance state for about 10 minutes, the doctors began the transfer. When the procedure was finished, before patients were taken out of the hypnotized state, they were given instructions intended to help them feel calm, relaxed and optimistic.

In the hypnosis group, 52 pregnancies occurred, for a pregnancy rate of 58.4 percent per patient and 53 percent per cycle. In the regular-procedure group, there were 29 pregnancies, for a per patient and per cycle pregnancy rate of 30.2 percent.

Levitas and his colleagues hypothesize that hypnosis helped a woman's uterus to remain relaxed, allowing the embryo to implant more easily. It is also possible, they say, that hypnosis produced changes in immune or hormonal uterine function resulting in "an improvement in the interaction between the blastocyst and the endometrium," or the lining of the uterus.

While the researchers attempted to make the hypnosis and non-hypnosis groups as similar as possible, the group that did not receive hypnosis had, on average, been infertile for a longer period. Levitas and his team performed statistical analysis to account for this, and found that hypnosis remained the key factor in pregnancy success. They call for additional studies to confirm these findings.

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