

Donors for Dollars

Clients can simply send us a photograph of themselves, their spouse or another individual of their choosing, and our staff will rank potential sperm donors according to their resemblance to the photograph,” says Suzanne Seltz. She’s the Marketing Communications Director for Genetics and IVF Institute (www.givf.com), headquartered in Virginia. GIVF’s sperm banks, FairfaxCryobank and Cryogenic Laboratories, claim to be the second and third largest providers in the business.

What are sperm or cryobanks? They collect, store, freeze and provide screened and tested specimens. Dr. Joanne Kaminski, Director of Midwest Sperm Bank (www.midwestspermbank.com) says, “Donor sperm banks are for couples struggling with male factor infertility that have exhausted all other avenues of assisted reproductive technologies.” Typical customers include couples for whom ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection) was not successful, single women, or those with gay partners.

Infertility affects roughly one in six couples. Problems tend to be equally divided between women and men - and fertility potential declines if you wait into your thirties and forties to have children.

Dr. Cappy Rothman, Medical Director of California Cryobank, the world’s largest sperm bank, was a pioneer in the specialization of male infertility. Rothman says

Talk to a counselor before starting your treatment cycles. A “get-prepared” session is often included as part of orientation. You will also spend time becoming familiar with the cycle protocol. Your menstrual cycles will be monitored, and you may be medicated to regulate ovulation. Once you have selected a donor, vials are shipped to the physician who will be performing the insemination. Consider reserving extra for future endeavors.

Donor insemination (DI) is achieved through ICI (intracervical insemination) or IUI (intrauterine insemination). ICI is done at home, in a physician’s office or fertility clinic. Sperm is loaded into a syringe, then into the vagina close to the cervix. IUI is performed in an office or clinic. A catheter is passed through the cervix and into the cavity of the uterus. Sperm is injected slowly into the uterus.

Sperm Donor Profiles

Most providers offer brochures or videotapes on their procedures, fees and donors. California Cryobank (www.cryobank.com) offers a search engine that allows you to select donors by characteristics (racial group, hair and eye color). You can purchase:

- Short and long donor profiles: a 28+ page medical/genetic history of the donor and his extended family, provided in donor’s handwriting.

**“Here’s a picture of Mel Gibson.
I want my baby to look like him.”**

the ideal biological age for men to become fathers - when they have the most sperm - is in their early twenties. Besides increasing age, he says, “sperm can be affected by many subjective variables,” such as stress, infection, pesticides, toxins, smoking, and other environmental conditions. “An ejaculation is a delicate mirror of a man’s health.”

Getting Started

Have you exhausted your male factor infertility options? Meet with a physician to talk about donor conception and determine if it’s right for you. Discuss prices and procedures with a sperm bank. Don’t limit yourself to local providers, since frozen semen can be shipped. Review costs, from small fees for basic information to more significant dollars for lengthy donor details.

- Donor baby photos: 5x7 photos of donor at the age of six months to four years.
- Donor audio interviews: hear a 30-minute interview with donor
- Keirsey Temperament Sorter Report: view donor’s results from this personality test.
- Donor Matching Consultations: client photos are matched with facial characteristics of donor photos stored in-house.

Many sperm banks offer online access to donor data. On New England Cryogenic Center’s site, www.necryogenic.com, sales and marketing manager Jessica Lucente notes, “Short profiles are available for free.” They include brief descriptions of the donor’s ethnic history, occupation, interests and hobbies. Download a longer profile for \$10. »

Dollars for donors

Quality Assurance

Pre-screening donors is critical and involves testing genetics, medical history, blood chemistry, and checking sperm for infections and STDs. Applicants undergo comprehensive physicals. Dr. Kaminski says, "It gets pretty complex, but we look at at least two to three samples for quality before we freeze them." Freezing the sperm maximizes assurance of a healthy donor. Dr. Kaminski continues, "We talk to the donors, get to know them, find out where they're coming from, and review roughly fifty pages of paperwork." Psychological screening ensures the donor understands the consequences of his actions - and is committed. "An entire Donor Profile is evaluated." Kaminski says, "and less than five percent of our applicants are accepted."

Oversight requirements vary by state. "We're one of a few cryobanks who are inspected and accredited by the American Association of Tissue Banks," Seitz says. Accreditation entails passing rigorous tests, from semen acquisition and storage practices to quality control and record keeping. Schlegel notes that standards are also "derived from the American Society of Reproductive Medicine."

Legal Matters

A baby born through DI is the legal child of the mother and her husband. The donor has no parental rights and cannot obtain your identity. But sperm banks do have different donor identity policies. California Cryobank, an anonymous sperm bank, recognizes the complexity of the identity issue. They aim to respect privacy but also meet the needs of the donor, client and child. Asking a donor how he may feel about this complicated issue 18 years from now - when the child is an adult - seems unfair. They seek to ensure that future contact, if agreed upon, will be positive for all parties.

Jason Schlegel, director of marketing and sales for Xytex, an Atlanta-based sperm provider, adds, "The use of open-identity release donors is prevalent, accounting for roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of all our sales-and is continuing to increase."

Donor Eggs

Not able to use your own eggs? GIVF's anonymous donor egg program has produced over 2,500 cycles since 1988. GIVF primarily recruits suburban college graduates, and donor profiles are accessible online.

Rebecca Dozier, egg donation program administrator for Baby Miracles, Inc. (www.baby-miracles.com) in California, says, "Potential recipients can review photos and mini-profiles of 100-plus donors online. They contact us, either by phone or email, with the name and identification number of the donors."

What's next? Potential egg donors undergo medical and psychological screenings before finalizing any contracts with recipients. Donor and recipient's cycles are medically synchronized. The donor is placed on fertility drugs to stimulate multiple follicles on her ovaries, while the recipient has her uterus prepared with hormonal therapy to sustain pregnancy. A recipient's cycle can be artificially controlled to interrupt natural cycles.

smart shopping guide

Questions to ask a sperm bank or donor egg program:

- How many years have you been in business?
- Are you recommended by fertility specialists?
- Are you accredited by the American Association of Tissue Banks or other regulatory bodies?
- Do you have a diverse list of donors?
- Can you provide comprehensive medical information on the donor and his extended family?
- Is this your primary business?
- What types of donors do you recruit? Are they reimbursed equally?
Are there genetic counselors on staff? Do they interview each donor?
- What is your donor identity policy?
- What is your pregnancy rate?

Dr. Kaminski adds, "Sperm banks differ in their approach, personalized service and donor pool. Take time to research and find one you'll be comfortable working with."

Viable eggs produced in a single donor cycle are inseminated, and embryos belong to the donor recipient. Frozen embryos, in excess of current needs, can be used by the recipient for subsequent attempts at pregnancy.

Cost

If you're using a first time egg donor in Baby Miracles' program, the agency's fee, donor's compensation, legal, screening, and lab charges can climb as high as \$8,500 to \$10,000. GIVF offers a refund program, as do some others. Restrictions apply, but if you don't conceive and deliver after four cycles, you get some money back. GIVF's program boasts a fifty to seventy-five percent success rate for donor egg insemination, but can cost up to \$50,000.

Sperm ranges from \$100 to \$350 per vial, and you need two to three vials per cycle. Don't forget about consultations (\$50 to \$100 or more), donor profiles (up to \$25) and shipping. Specimens are shipped in small liquid nitrogen tanks. New England Cryogenic Center charge \$50 for local courier. Another, Midwest Sperm Bank, offers free shipping in Chacagoland.

Is there a doctor in the house? Fairfax Cryobank will send an IUI-ready dose from a donor with a Ph.D. for \$335. IUI-ready specimens are \$275 at California Cryobank and \$200 per vial at Midwest Sperm Bank.

Prepare to pony up serious cash for fertility workups and surgery. "Donor insemination can cost up to \$1,500 or more per treatment, and IVF can run \$15,000 to \$20,000 per cycle," Seitz says. "Add another \$1,500 to \$2,000 to the cost of IVF for ICSI." Money issues aside, conception success rates vary by donor bank, by fertility clinic, and by the quality of the donors and patients. Consult individual labs and clinics for their results.

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