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Thoughts from a Donor

A young woman talks candidly about some of the ups and downs of her egg-donating experiences over the years -- and why she chose to do it in the first place.

by Anonymous

Below is a conversation we had with a single Jewish woman from Massachusetts who has much experience with egg donation. Our subject chose to remain anonymous, given how vital it is to the process at the agency where she donated her eggs. Of course, privacy also allowed her to discuss her feelings candidly without any worries of being judged. It should be noted that we asked the head of the agency--A Perfect Match, located in California—to read over the interview for accuracy, which she did.

Age: 26

Age when you donated your first egg: 19

However, I should add that the use of "egg" in this question is a misnomer, as each time you donate, your body is stimulated to release multiple eggs. Not all of them will be mature enough to be fertilized. Even so, the (recipient) family will need multiple eggs to attempt the in vitro fertilization.

How many eggs you have donated so far:

I have donated five times, for a total of well over a hundred eggs.

What inspired you to donate your eggs in the first place?

There were two reasons. One was frighteningly large student loans. The other was seeing relatives who were infertile, and how hard it was for them.

What was the hardest part for you in making the decision to donate your eggs?

I was most concerned about my ability to undergo the physical and emotional challenges of the process while continuing with a really challenging academic load. I also was worried that my feelings about the process might change in the years ahead, and that I might regret it.

Have your feelings changed since you first donated?

It really hasn't been that long. I guess every now and then it occurs to me that there are six-year-olds running around that are genetically related to me. But, really, in the end, we are all very closely genetically related. I don't think it's the most important thing. That's not the sole determinate of what makes a family anymore. In any case, you have to really want to be a parent and have a lot of financial resources to do this process, so I'm sure they are well taken care of.

Do you think about the fact that, if you have a child someday, it will have half-sibling out there somewhere?

Yes, if I have a child, he or she will have half-siblings, but this is no more an issue than for women who give their children up for adoption when they are very young and then later have children and keep them.

How were the physical procedures that you experienced through the process of donating your eggs? Was it better or worse than you expected?

The physical procedure of the actual egg aspiration is not that difficult. It was easier than I expected. Of course everyone has different reactions to being under complete anesthesia. You need to give yourself multiple injections with hormones for a period of time before the aspiration. These hormones can have a strong effect

on your mood and energy level. Also, you have to stop exercising for a period of time right before and after the aspiration. So even though you are not actually pregnant, there is a certain amount of disturbance that occurs in your daily life. You can be very uncomfortable for several days after the surgery, though this varies for each person. For me, this even varied each time I did it.

What have you learned through this process?

Even though I have never had my own children, I feel as though I am much more prepared for pregnancy and have a better idea of what that might be like.

Do you worry about having enough eggs left to have your own baby?

While I don't have the exact web-link to the information (note: see [Behind Closed Doors](#) for this information), I have researched this question. Unfortunately, there are a lot of commonly held misconceptions about this issue. Basically, women are born with thousands of eggs, more than you can ever use in your lifetime. The removal of a few hundred doesn't affect a woman's fertility. However, eggs grow old, and eventually they become too old to be viable—so you enter menopause. That's why older women have a greater risk of giving birth to babies with genetic problems. For this same reason, you can grow too old to donate. While you technically could donate, young women's eggs are stronger, in better condition, and more of them are likely to survive IVF intact.

Do you or will you ever hear from the recipient?

No. The whole process is completely anonymous. However, sometimes recipients request meetings or phone calls with donors prior to the procedure and I have done that as well. If the child and I both want to contact each other once they are an adult, there are means for this to happen.

Would you be interested in finding out about the babies that have been born as a result of your donating eggs to the mother?

I have mixed feelings about this. While I am glad to hear that the families have been successful, I am cautious to hear anything more. I don't really want to hear details about the child because I don't think of it as mine. Not only am I not raising it, but I didn't even carry it in my womb for nine months. I don't consider myself a "mother."

What is the most rewarding part about the experience for you?

I have donated to Jewish families who were unable to have a healthy child due to genetic diseases they

carried, as well as to gay men who were unable to adopt children due to legal biases. I feel very good about giving those who very much wanted to have children the ability to witness the birth of their own healthy children who are theirs legally and at least half genetically.

What would you tell a woman who was deciding whether or not to go through the process of donating her eggs?

I would say to be ready to commit a certain amount of time to the process. You have to be ready for the process to go forward at any time when all the participants line up correctly. There are long legal contracts, many medical exams, injections, and surgery. Make sure you have the energy, time, and support from people in your life. However, in the end it is very rewarding.

Will you donate another egg?

I am getting to the upper limit of age for egg donors so I may not do it again.

Note: We talked to the agency, where this woman has been donating, about age limitation. The owner had this to say: "The youngest is 19 (with parental involvement only) and we take up to age 29; though studies have shown that egg quality really does start diminishing around age 27. We don't have many donors that are over 25 to 26 for that reason. Some centers will not consider donors under 21, and many East Coast centers will work with women up to 32 to 34...but, most West Coast centers would never go that old."

Is there anything else you'd like to clear up in terms of misconceptions about egg donations?

Yes. A lot of people assume egg donation is something that people are doing just to make money—as if it needs to be purely altruistic to be a good act. The amount of money is nothing but a very fair compensation for time invested and hardship suffered. That's why sperm donors only get paid a few hundred dollars.

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Michelle Cove, Editor-in-Chief of 614: The HBI eZine



