



Less Money Means More Egg Donors

Donor Says Women Should Understand 'There's a Child Out There That's Part of Them'

By JUJU CHANG and KIRAN KHALID

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Bethany Grinstead is a very fertile stay-at-home mother of five young children. The 26-year-old says her good fortune with fertility is helping her make money as an egg donor.

"I'm very passionate when it comes to kids and being able to help my family financially as well was another motivating factor," Grinstead said of being an egg donor.

Good genes and looks have made Grinstead a valued donor. She has already donated twice, and made \$5,000 each time. The first time she produced 18 eggs, the second time 22. Some donors make up to \$10,000 each time they donate.

As she prepares for her third donation, she said the shaky economy is very much on her mind.

"My boyfriend is in real estate, and with the housing market the way it has been, we do struggle," she said. "But I want to stay at home with my kids. The kids are growing up, and we'll need [the money] for college and stuff."

Doctors and others in the fertility industry say they're seeing a dramatic uptick not just in new donors but, as with Grinstead, in repeat donors looking to pay the bills.

"I have been involved in the reproduction industry since 1990, and I have never seen this kind of an increase in the number of applications with eggs, sperm donors or surrogates," said Cathy Ruberto, a registered nurse who owns a fertility clinic in Naples, Fla.

Declining Standards?

Fertility experts across the country have reported a 30 to 40 percent increase in applicants. But there is concern that the spike may inspire a decline in standards for donors.

Nancy Block, founder and CEO of the Center for Egg Options Illinois in Northbrook, IL., says there are also very few standards in the industry.

"It's important that there's some standards set for egg-donor recruiters," Block said. "Anyone can get a business license to do egg donor recruiting."

Her organization is calling for a national registry to protect the rights of the unborn child. Medical records about the donor are only kept for 10 years, for instance, depriving children of information about their medical and genetic inheritance down the road.

The process of donating eggs is time consuming and can be physically unpleasant. Donors have to undergo fertility treatments that can cause side effects such as hot flashes, headaches and mood swings. Donors also have frequent follow-up appointments with doctors and recovery time after egg harvesting can take several days.

The entire process, from donor matching to egg retrieval, can take three months.

Grinstead said that it's tedious. "I don't think I would do it that much without the money," she said. "It's not worth all the energy and time that's put into it."

As for the risks, repeat egg donors have shown no long-term health complications, according to the American Fertility Association in New York City.

For those interested in finding out about being an egg donor, fertility experts suggest getting a referral from a physician. They also recommend researching agencies and getting feedback from other patients.

Most agencies ask that potential donors undergo physical and mental health screenings, and nurse Block said the perfect candidate should be as concerned about helping infertile couples as they are about earning quick cash.

Doner Grinstead also warned that women interested in donating eggs need to consider all the implications first.

"I think they definitely should be able to understand that there will be a child out there that is part of them and to make sure they can psychologically handle that before they actually go through with it for the money or for wanting to help," she said.