

**Knowing When to Stop Trying**  
By Janet Jaffe, Ph.D.  
Center for Reproductive Psychology  
[www.ReproductivePsych.org](http://www.ReproductivePsych.org)  
[www.UnsungLullabies.com](http://www.UnsungLullabies.com)

One of the most profound decisions you must make when dealing with infertility – as important as the decision to try to conceive in the first place – is the decision to stop trying. How do you know when enough is enough? How can you be sure that one more try won't do the trick? Like a gambler going for broke, even though the odds may be against you, you may feel compelled to try again – and again – because the prize, having a baby, is priceless.

But infertility treatment takes its toll in so many dimension of life:

- **Physically:** You may be exhausted from the side-effects of medication and multiple invasive procedures.
- **Emotionally:** The ongoing and tumultuous roller coaster of emotions – from despair to hope and back again – can wear you out.
- **Interpersonally:** Relationships – between you and your partner, as well as with family and friends – can be strained, sometimes to the breaking point. Watching others get pregnant and have their dreams come true can drive a wedge between you and those closest to you.
- **Financially:** The high cost of reproductive treatment, sometimes only partially covered by insurance, often not covered at all, is yet another major stressor.

If any or all of these are causing significant tension in your life, then it may be necessary to get off of the infertility treadmill and rethink your options. It can be helpful to ask yourself what is most important to you and your partner:

- Is it the experience of pregnancy and childbirth?
- Is it passing on your and your partner's genetic selves?
- Is it the experience of being parents and raising a family?

Depending on how you answer these questions will open or close doors. For example, if you are less concerned about genetics, but really want to experience pregnancy, then you might consider using donor eggs, sperm, or both. Or if you are willing to forego the pregnancy experience and rank raising children as your most important objective, then adoption could be the right choice for you. There are no right or wrong answers; each individual and each couple must come to their own conclusion.

But this is not easy work. It takes much soul-searching to really accept that your first choice – having your own biological child the "old-fashioned" way – is not a

possibility. It is a process, and as much as you may want to hurry it up, it takes time. No matter what you decide upon – whether to start a family using alternative reproductive techniques, opting for adoption, or choosing to remain a family of two – it is vital to mourn what you have lost.

You might experiment by “trying on” each option open to you as you would a new article of clothing, living with it for awhile, and seeing what fits the best. Remember that it’s normal to feel resolved about your decision at one moment, and feel completely unsure of yourself the next. That’s why it’s important to allow yourself time, especially hard when you may be feeling that time is of the essence and you have none to waste.

What can be particularly painful in knowing when to stop is if you and your partner disagree as to what the next best fit is. You may be ready to move forward with adoption, for example, while your partner may want to try IVF one last time. At these moments of impasse, it can be helpful to talk things out and really listen “between the lines” to what each other has to say. With a deeper understanding of each other’s needs, you and your partner can find room to negotiate and compromise, and help each other move forward to the next phase of building your family.

*Janet Jaffe, Ph.D. is a psychologist in San Diego, CA helping men and women cope with infertility and pregnancy loss since 1996. She is a co-founder of the Center for Reproductive Psychology and co-author of *Unsung Lullabies: Understanding and Coping with Infertility* (St. Martin’s Press, 2005). For more information visit: [www.ReproductivePsych.org](http://www.ReproductivePsych.org) or [www.UnsungLullabies.com](http://www.UnsungLullabies.com).*