

Work

Increasing numbers of people are considering fertility preservation, and in particular egg freezing, as a way of helping to make sure that when they're ready for a family, they have the best possible chance of conceiving.

If you've decided to begin your fertility journey, such as freezing your eggs, it is not one which you'll have taken lightly. There are many things to consider, including the impact it could have on your job or career. Informing your employer and colleagues about your fertility journey can feel like another minefield – who needs to know? When should I tell them? How should I tell them?

This guide will help you to navigate these conversations – it contains useful insights from a healthcare professional and someone who has been through the journey first-hand too.



The authors

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Julie Nekkebroeck is a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist working at Brussels-IVF. She is involved in fertility screenings and counselling patients on oocyte cryo-preservation. Julie helps patients make well-informed decisions supporting them before, during and after treatment to feel ready to embark on (single) motherhood.



Amy Jones

Amy Jones speaks openly about her fertility journey on her platforms alongside her professional career. She previously froze her eggs with a view to use with a future partner or as a solo mumma journey. Her first-hand experience of handling fertility conversations at work, make her an ideal person to support for this guide.

Informing employees and colleagues about your fertility journey

Time off for clinic appointments, side effects from fertility treatments and the emotional toll procedures may take, are all important considerations when thinking if, when, how and who to tell at work.

You are under no obligation to tell your employers or colleagues about your fertility journey but may think it would be useful to inform some people.

Who: Employers may need to be aware of absences and colleagues may find it useful to know any impacts to your work. Each role and each organisation will be different – think who might need to know, and who you'd feel most comfortable telling.

When: There's no right or wrong time to inform employers or colleagues – only when feels right for you.

How: How you tell people will depend on a number of factors, including the role of the person you're telling (formal HR or a close colleague whose work load may be impacted by your absence), your relationship with them and the specific stage in the process you're at. Either a written email or in person talk is completely up to you.



It's useful to be prepared; in advance, think through the questions they might have and how you might answer them.

How much time off will you need?

This will be determined by the specific fertility preservation route you have decided to follow.

It's a good idea to discuss your current leave policy and number of days. The nature of your job and how flexible it is may impact what's possible – are you able to work from home and/or make up the time outside your normal working hours?

Will this impact your capability to work?

Some women do experience side effects from fertility drugs, though in most cases any reaction will be mild.¹ The process and procedure may

impact you emotionally too, which could affect your ability to work.

What can we do to support you?

The conversation will be more constructive if you've thought about this question in advance and have some concrete examples of ways in which your employer can help.

Is there a preferred way for you to keep us updated?

Consider how you would feel most comfortable communicating to your employer – in person or over email, weekly or monthly.



Thoughts from Julie

"Egg freezing is usually a short-term procedure with a large part of the treatment done in conjunction with work. For the day of the egg retrieval and recuperation (of 2 days) a medical note is provided.

In my experience, most women receive positive responses from being open about this topic or IVF. Opening up to direct colleagues and your superior helps with a comprehensive appraisal on their part and receiving practical help and support. This will reduce stress related to the process.

Moreover, your (temporary) absences at work or slightly different working hours will not be confused with a decline in your work motivation!



Thoughts from Amy

"I'm so fortunate that, not only were my firm incredibly understanding and flexible, but they also offer fertility leave which I made use of. We agreed I'd keep my team updated on an ongoing basis on how my journey was progressing in terms of any impacts on my working schedule, including blocking out in my diary as soon as any appointments were scheduled so they'd know when I wasn't available to work."

What your colleagues will need to know

Will this impact your current projects and team capacity?

Before you meet, consider when time off might be required and how that fits with your and others' schedules, projects and plans. Although you can't plan for the unexpected, it's good to highlight and address any areas of concern upfront. It is also good to understand your options should you need to take time out – do they have a sickness policy and what is the protocol with sick pay for example?

Would you like the rest of the team to know?

You might think it useful for one colleague to know, but not for it to be public knowledge in the workplace. Or you might feel more comfortable if everyone is aware. This is very personal, but it's worth considering your preference in advance of a meeting.

What to do if the conversation is difficult

Hopefully telling your employer and colleagues about your fertility journey will be a positive, reassuring experience. But what should you do if it isn't?

The conversation should not make you feel uncomfortable, but if it does, consider ways in which you can exit it politely and professionally.

"Could we come back to this discussion another time?"

"It would be good if we could take a break from this discussion for now."

"Can I get back to you about that question?"

At that point you might want to consider if there's anyone else who you may feel more comfortable speaking to.

Thoughts from Julie

"Your employer and colleagues would want to know what impact this is going to have on you and your work. As this is a new experience for you, it's not always easy to provide reassurance and estimate the impact, but trust that you are always allowed to leave a conversation if you ever feel uncomfortable."

Thoughts from Amy

"I decided to be completely open with both management and colleagues about my fertility journey, and I'm really glad I did as I found that everyone was super interested and supportive. I explained that as it's a fertility procedure your medical appointments are focused on your menstrual cycle and how your body responds to any supporting medication which can make it difficult to plan exact dates."

Remember, every situation and every person are unique, but being prepared for a discussion in advance is universal.

Additional support on fertility preservation is found in our fertility Q&A on [fertilitychoices.com](https://www.fertilitychoices.com).
Hear from others about their unique fertility journey here too.

Supported by:



1. Petropanagos A, et al. Social egg freezing; risk, benefits and other considerations. CMAJ 2015;187(9):666-669.

Find out more about your first consultation with our Consultation Guide at [fertilitychoices.com](https://www.fertilitychoices.com)