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Egg Freezing: Listening to Your Biological Clock



Contributor: [Mark Donald Hornstein, MD](#)

Mark Donald Hornstein, MD, is Director of the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH).



Contributor: [Rachel Kathleen Ashby, MD](#)

Rachel Kathleen Ashby, MD, is Director of the Donor Egg and Gestational Carrier Program at the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH).

Like many ambitious women in their twenties, [Jenny Johnson](#) was married to her job.

As she nurtured her career as an executive producer and lifestyle television personality, the days turned into months, months into years. She knew she wanted a family someday, but it wasn't a priority.

"When I turned 30, I realized I couldn't push the snooze button on pregnancy anymore. I started applying the same diligence I had used in my professional life to my personal life," says Johnson.

A Fertility Wakeup Call



Johnson
educated
herself and was
surprised to
learn how fast
women's
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“I realized I could be ready to start a family and might not even have the option. I wanted to be a mother, but I wanted a different timeline than my mother or grandmother,” she says.

A year into her research, she heard about embryo



Jenny Johnson is an Emmy Award winning executive producer and television personality.

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cryopreservation, or egg freezing, a medical procedure where a woman’s eggs are frozen for future use.

A Massachusetts native, born at Brigham and Women’s Hospital (BWH), she made an appointment at the [Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery at BWH](#).

The Next Chapter

At 33-years-old, Johnson met with [Dr. Antonio Gargiulo](#), an infertility specialist at the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery, who helped her decide whether egg freezing was right for her. Dr. Gargiulo explained that women under age 35 achieved the best results.

Johnson says she received the counseling and attention she needed to move forward. After the initial testing, Dr. Gargiulo informed Johnson that she had a strong, healthy pool of eggs.

By the Numbers

Most women around the age of 30 produce about eight to 20 eggs per retrieval, but the chances of a pregnancy are increased if more eggs are retrieved. If a woman produces 20 eggs, her odds of pregnancy is approximately 80 to 90 percent.

On average, a single egg leads to a live birth [two to 12](#) percent of the time. These chances are lower for women in their late 30s and early 40s. The success rates for young woman is roughly 40 to 50 percent per treatment, which typically includes freezing 10 eggs, sometimes up to 20 eggs.

To schedule an appointment with our Patient Coordinator, call (617) 732-4222 (select Option 1). Convenient early morning and evening appointments available.

“ To women thinking about egg freezing, be prepared for a beautiful journey of self-exploration that leaves you feeling able, confident, connected and hopeful for your future family. ”

“For women 38-years-old and older, I often discuss the possibility of other options beyond egg freezing as the chances of pregnancy are reduced,” says [Dr. Rachel Ashby](#), an infertility specialist and head of the [Egg Donation Program](#) in the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery at BWH. Alternatives to egg freezing include gestational carrier or adoption.

To help women understand the probability of a pregnancy from frozen eggs, Dr. Randi Goldman and [Dr. Janis H. Fox](#), reproductive endocrinologists at the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery, [developed an algorithm](#) that calculates the chances of a live birth based on a patient’s age and how many eggs are retrieved during a treatment.

“We wanted to create a tool to provide guidance for our patients, who are making major decisions about their lives, families and finances,” says Dr. Fox.



A canister containing frozen embryos in liquid nitrogen for later use.

How Does Egg Freezing Work?

At the first introductory visit, a physician takes a detailed reproductive and medical history, and then performs a physical exam and order laboratory tests to determine if a patient may be a suitable candidate for egg freezing.

If a decision is made to proceed, the process involves two weeks of injections of fertility medications to stimulate egg production (ovarian stimulation). Once tests indicate that eggs have developed in the ovaries, the eggs are removed (under light anesthesia) by a fertility specialist using a small ultrasound guided needle. The eggs are then counted and frozen in liquid nitrogen for later use.

While egg freezing expands a woman’s reproductive options, says [Dr. Mark Hornstein](#), Director of the Center for Infertility and Reproductive Surgery at BWH, he reminds his

patients that it shouldn't be viewed like an insurance policy.

"The process may not result in a successful pregnancy. We do everything we can to increase the odds, but we can't make any guarantees," says Hornstein.

Coming Full Circle

Johnson has no second thoughts about her decision. Whether she uses her stored eggs or not, she plans to start her family at the same hospital in which she was born, a way of coming full circle, she says.

"To women thinking about egg freezing, be prepared for a beautiful journey of self-exploration that leaves you feeling able, confident, connected and hopeful for your future family," says Johnson.

- By Dustin G.

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