**[Infertility](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=59057)** is the inability of a couple to become [pregnant](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=10695) (regardless of cause) after 1 year of unprotected sexual intercourse -using no birth control methods.

Infertility affects about 6.1 million people in the United States, about 10% of men and women of reproductive age.

Couples who are infertile sometimes undergo medical procedures to get pregnant:

**Artificial insemination (**[intracytoplasmic sperm injection](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=7299) (ICSI)**)** is the process by which [sperm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spermatozoon) is placed into the reproductive tract of a female for the purpose of impregnating the female by using means other than [sexual intercourse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_intercourse) or [natural insemination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insemination).

**In vitro fertilization** (IVF) a man’s sperm and the woman’s egg are combined in a laboratory dish, where fertilization occurs.

The resulting [embryo](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=3225) is then transferred to the woman's [uterus](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=5918) (womb) to implant and develop naturally. Usually, 2-4 embryos are placed in the woman's uterus at one time. Each attempt is called a cycle.

IVF was used successfully for the first time in the United States in 1981. More than 250,000 babies have been born since then as a result of using the in vitro fertilization technique. IVF offers [infertile](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=19354) couples a chance to have a child who is biologically related to them.

*The term test tube baby is often used to refer to children conceived with this technique.*

**Ovum transfer** is a procedure that takes a [healthy](http://www.ehow.com/about_4707351_what-ovum-transfer.html), fertilized egg cell and transplants it into the uterus of another woman. This procedure has been done successfully for more than 20 years as a remedy for infertility.

**Multiple births** are often the result of IVF and they occur when more than one [fetus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetus) is carried to term in a single [pregnancy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pregnancy).

Different names for multiple births are used, depending on the number of offspring. Common multiples are two and three, known as twins and triplets. They can be identical or fraternal.

* ***Identical*** meaning that they develop from one [zygote](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zygote) that splits and forms two or more embryos
* ***Fraternal*** because they develop from two separate eggs that are fertilized by two separate [sperm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sperm).

Note: Sperm is capable of fertilizing an ovum for 48 to 72 hours.