

Finding an egg donor



Finding an egg donor can seem impossible. ‘Where do I begin?’ ‘Who could I possibly ask?’ You may feel apprehensive about needing someone’s help for such a personal purpose.

This information aims to help you through the process of finding a local donor step-by-step.

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Many women in Victoria are willing and happy to help others to become parents via donation. In the past year, over 220 women donated eggs in Victoria.

Finding a local donor rather than travelling overseas for treatment can have enormous advantages. A local donor has the benefit of legal protections that ensure that she can be known to your potential child and to you, and is perhaps more likely to have a similar value set, appearance and language to your own. Apart from the obvious lower cost factor, it is also much easier for you to travel to your local clinic than heading abroad.

Are you emotionally ready?

Before you start looking for an egg donor, it is important that you have given yourself time and space to reconcile as much as possible not being able to use your own eggs to have a child. This is a big thing to have to give up and most people need time to grieve for all the things such a loss might entail, such as physical resemblances and family history.

It is important that you feel confident you are able to love this child regardless of his or her genetic origins. You can't expect your child to be comfortable being donor-conceived if you are not. Your child is much wanted and will be much loved.

It is important that you will be positive and proud of the journey you took to create them, so that they can be too. You may benefit from talking to other parents who have donor-conceived children who can reassure you that they absolutely adore their children and that they can't imagine their life without them.

Many recipient parents experience doubts. A common fear is that the donor will not be able to relinquish parental responsibility and will want to intrude or interfere with your family. This concern is completely unfounded. No egg donor in Victoria has ever challenged the recipient parents for custody. Remember, the donor has donated so that she could help the recipients become parents. If she wanted more children herself she could have them if she wished. All donors have counselling to ensure that they are aware that they have no parental rights or responsibilities for the child, and that the recipient parents are the legal guardians and are responsible for all parental decisions.

See the VARTA brochure 'Using a donor?' for more information about the legal and emotional aspects of donor conception. You may also wish to contact your clinic counsellor for advice and support.

Ask yourself:

'Am I ready to parent a child I don't share a genetic connection with?'

Finding an egg donor

Who makes an ideal egg donor?

People often wonder what sort of woman donates her eggs and what qualities you should look for.

Donors are preferably:

- aged between 25-36 years. Women younger than this may not be able to fully appreciate the implications of donating. Older women are likely to have decreased fertility and therefore chance of success but may still be able to donate if they are fertile.
- already mothers themselves. Women who are mothers have proven fertility and can perhaps better understand the consequences of donating. It is also preferable, although not essential, if they have completed their family.
- healthy - physically, mentally and in terms of lifestyle.
- motivated by a desire to help others. It is not legal to pay donors; however they can of course be reimbursed for travel and medical expenses.
- sensible and settled. It is advisable that their life is fairly stable and that they have a good support network. If someone is recovering from a recent break up or has started a new job, it may be difficult for them to cope with medical appointments and procedures.
- prepared to be identified to the child, as Victorian legislation requires this.

You may have preferences regarding your donor's appearance or cultural background. However, it is just as important that you share the same views as to how your arrangement will work and that you 'click' with her. Remember that your potential child will be genetically linked with your donor so it is important that you get along.

How to find a donor?

Here are three ways you may consider:

- Asking someone you know
- Advertising for an egg donor you don't know
- Finding a donor online

Asking someone you know



If you prefer to use a donor that you already know, it can be awkward to ask them directly – if they are not comfortable with donation, it may affect your future relationship with them. Rather than directly asking someone to help you, a good option may be to let it be known that you have been advised by your fertility specialist to consider egg donation and then wait to see who offers. If you have been private about your infertility treatment, this may seem challenging. However, discussing your situation with others can actually help you to feel more comfortable.

Potential donors are everywhere; however they won't know you need one unless you let it be known. You need to be proactive and step outside your comfort zone. The more people who know that you require a donor, the more chance there is of finding someone who offers to help you. Sometimes it may not be someone you know directly. Word of mouth or social media can reach others. It may be that a friend of a friend has been considering donating for some time and offers when she hears you need assistance.

Finding an egg donor

Advertising for an egg donor you don't know



It is a legal requirement that before you advertise, you need to have the draft advertisement officially approved.

Send a copy of the wording you plan to use to:

Minister for Health
Department of Human Services
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne VIC 3001

It is often difficult to know what wording to put in your advertisement and where to place it. You might find it helpful to look at examples of other advertisements. These may be found in 'Melbourne's Child' parenting magazine. It is suggested that you describe yourselves a little and say why you need a donor. You can include that the donor would be reimbursed for any medical and travelling expenses. To attract a compatible donor, it is important your advertisement stands out and uniquely reflects you and your situation. It is advised you consider your privacy and set up a non-identifying email address, or a post office box and that you give a mobile phone number rather than a home number for this purpose. Be prepared that it may take some time before your ad is successful and that not everyone who responds may be a suitable donor for you.

Finding a donor online



Many people find their egg donor via online forums set up for this purpose.

You can find egg donation forums at:

- www.aussieeggdonors.com
- www.fertilityconnections.com.au
- www.bellybelly.com.au
- www.essentialbaby.com.au
- www.bubhub.com.au
- www.eggdonationaustralia.com.au
- www.eggdonorangels.com.au

When accessing an internet forum, it is advisable to use a pseudonym and to follow the usual social media practices to protect your privacy.

Finding an egg donor

When a potential donor responds

Whether it is someone you know, someone from an internet forum or someone who has answered your advertisement, the principles of discussing donation with a potential donor are similar. If you don't already know the person who is considering donation, this can be done initially via email and phone. Conversation can be continued at a neutral location.

It is important to thank the potential donor for contacting you and offer to send them some further information about what is involved physically, emotionally and legally. Your fertility clinic is likely to be able to provide this information. You might also like to give them a copy of the VARTA brochures 'Time to donate?' and 'What is ART?'

Some women may not be aware of the physical implications of treatment and may be unaware that injections and egg collection procedures are involved or that internal examinations are required. For others, their partner may not be comfortable about the idea of donation. Some, after careful reflection, decide against proceeding. Thank them for considering donating. Reassure them that it is better for them to withdraw than to continue if they have serious doubts or are only proceeding out of a sense of obligation.

Think it through together

If someone continues to consider donating to you after learning about what is involved, it is important to explore the expectations of all parties, including partners, about future contact and the potential role the donor might have in the child's life. You do not need to become best friends with your donor; however, it is important that you like and respect her and are able to stay in touch for your potential child's sake. Ideally all parties will have similar ideas as to how this will work for each of you. Some recipients and donors agree to occasional contact and the exchange of photos/cards/

emails/Skype. Others prefer to have more contact; some donors and recipients develop friendships.

At the back of this brochure, you'll find a list of questions that may be used as a guide.

It is important for these conversations to be as relaxed as possible so that neither person feels like they are going for a job interview! Expect both you and your partner (if you have one) and the donor to feel quite nervous when talking or meeting for the first time. Be yourself. Be honest. And be prepared to also share personal information about yourself. It can seem like quite a surreal experience – a bit like a blind date except very different. Hopefully, after the first few minutes you can both start to relax and get to know each other.

Take your time. Don't rush.

The issues are complex, and both you and your donor need time to think them through while getting to know each other and deciding whether or not to proceed. While you may have been thinking through the implications of donation for some time, your donor might have only recently considered it. She also needs to trust you and be sure that you are the right recipient for her. Usually, many conversations are needed. It is important that the donor's partner (if she has one) is also involved as well as yours. Sometimes the potential egg donor and female recipient do all the talking and thinking, don't include their partners and then wonder why the partners might be less enthusiastic than they would like. The potential donor also needs time to consider the implications for her immediate and extended family.

It can be difficult to take the time needed when the desire to have a child is so strong. However it is crucial you give your potential donor the thinking space she needs and try not to put any undue pressure on her. Keep in contact, however, as the potential donor may assume if she doesn't hear from you that you are no longer interested.

Finding an egg donor

If after careful thought you and the donor have very different expectations about the future, then it is probably better that she donate to someone else or not at all. While this may be initially very difficult for you, in the long run it is better for you and your child that you find someone with whom you share more compatible views.

Ask yourself:

‘Can I imagine my child approving of our choice of donor and the way we have gone about this?’

‘Will I be comfortable about our arrangement at my child’s twenty-first birthday and beyond? Will my child? Will the donor?’

Beware

While the vast majority of potential donors are wonderful, generous people, you do need to be careful. There have been rare occasions when a potential donor has illegally demanded payment. Please inform your clinic counsellor if this occurs.

Next steps

If, after careful consideration, you and your donor feel comfortable about going ahead, all involved parties will have counselling and medical appointments at your fertility clinic and there will be consent forms to sign. While this process might seem onerous, it is to ensure that you are all fully informed and prepared and that there is a positive outcome for all.

Further resources

VARTA has information about donor-conception issues including films, podcasts, articles and recommended books for recipient parents, donors and donor-conceived people: www.varta.org.au

Questions to ask your potential egg donor

When a potential donor is already known to you

- How do you think donating might affect our relationship?
- Do you think your relationship with a potential child born from your donation would be different from your relationship with a child I conceived without your donation?
- Who in our circle of friends and family do you think should be aware of the donation?

Notes

Motivations

- Why do you want to donate?
- How long have you been thinking about donating?
- Why did you choose to donate to me/us?
- Have you ever donated to anyone else? If so, were any children born?
- Is this the right time for you to donate? What else is going on in your life right now?

Family and work

- What is your family situation? Partner? Children? Ages? Extended family?
- Do you have anyone to support you through this?
- Have you discussed donating with your partner/children/extended family? Are they comfortable with you donating? How might this affect them?
- If you haven't told people, do you intend to? If so, when might you do this?
- Do you work outside the home? How flexible is your workplace if you need to take time off?

Questions to ask your potential egg donor

Health	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How old are you? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you or your extended family have any medical conditions that might be heritable, such as allergies, cancer, heart problems, mental health issues? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you smoke, drink, use recreational drugs? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me about your previous pregnancies? Have you ever had a termination, miscarriage, stillbirth or relinquished a child for adoption? 	
<p>Medical procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you know about the medical procedures involved in donating? Are you comfortable with having injections, internal ultrasounds and the egg collection procedure? Are you aware of the possible risks they entail? How will you manage with treatment and work/looking after children? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you aware that it is likely that eggs will be fertilised and the resulting extra embryos will be stored for future use? This means that if we are not successful, we can try again without the need for another egg collection. Even if we are successful, it means that we can try to have another child in the future. If we have finished our family and are unable to use any remaining embryos, the options are to: dispose of the embryos, give them to research or donate them to someone. Do you have any strong feelings about embryo storage and what should happen to any extra embryos we may not use? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you feel if we were to become pregnant and the baby was diagnosed with a serious abnormality and we decided to terminate the pregnancy - or if we didn't? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you aware that the treatment may not be successful? How would you feel if we do not become pregnant or miscarry? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the treatment was not successful would you be prepared to donate again? 	

Questions to ask your potential egg donor

Legal implications

- Are you aware that the law in Victoria allows that (if we lost contact with each other) any child born, upon turning 18, has the right to know who you are? They can do so by applying to the Donor Register.

Notes

- Are you aware that we, as the parents, are the legal guardians of the child and you, as the donor, won't have any rights or responsibilities towards the child? Therefore, if we die, the guardians we nominate will be legally responsible for our child. Donors are also not responsible for providing any child support payment.

- Are you aware that it is illegal to pay you for donating? We will of course pay any medical or travel expenses.

Future contact and role

- How do you think you will feel towards our child?

- Would you be prepared to stay in contact with us if the treatment is successful and we are able to have a child from your donation?

- If so, how much contact would you ideally like to have and would you prefer it to be face-to-face contact or via email/Facebook/mail. Will it possibly involve family celebrations?

- We intend to tell our child about you as we think it will be important for our child to know where they have come from and your special part in their beginning? Are you comfortable with this?

- What role do you imagine you might have in our child's life?

- What would you like our child to call you?

- Do you imagine there will be any future contact between our child and your children?