

Resisting the road less traveled

by Tina Smith

You could be a newlywed approaching your first anniversary. Maybe you've been happily married for a decade. Either way, you want to be pregnant and you're not.

Infertility does not discriminate. Women of varying ages and races with assorted medical histories face the harsh reality of not being able to conceive or carry a baby to term. National statistics from the Centers for Disease Control confirm that more than 7 million women under the age of 45 have an impaired ability to have children.

But not you. Surely not you. You have an ultra-healthy lifestyle. You took the smart route, finished school and paid off debts before trying to start a family. You met the man of your dreams a little later in life. You never did anything to prevent getting pregnant but simply went on living as the years clicked by. Now you can't wrap your mind around the idea that your path to parenthood won't be as easy as it seems to be for every other woman around you. You refuse to let go of how you always imagined getting pregnant would be – spontaneous, surprising, special.

What do you do? Where do you go? How do you begin a journey that you don't want to take?

Infertility is defined as the failure to conceive after a year of regular intercourse without contraception. If you found out that you fit the specific terms of any other health condition, wouldn't your immediate response be to seek medical help? This case is no exception.

An appointment with a reproductive endocrinologist is the beginning of a new course. Ask your family doctor or gynecologist to refer you if that helps get you to the starting gate. It's essential to begin the process of understanding what infertility treatment is all about, and you can't fully accomplish that without a physician. Once a relationship begins between you and your fertility doctor, facts will outweigh your fears as you learn about testing, procedures, risks, success rates, medications, financial aspects and the sometimes overwhelming but most often effective process of assisted reproduction.

Even while partnered with a specialist, you need to stay engaged and proactive – particularly when feeling like you are in uncharted territory. Write down questions and concerns to ask during your next appointment, explore websites, look for insightful books and other resources, find healthy outlets like exercise and travel, talk with those who have survived infertility or join a support group of women who still trod the unpopular stones. Chances are you'll never embrace this direction your life is taking, but information can make pressing forward much easier than blindly moving along.

Take that first step and call today.

Tina Smith is a communications specialist and patient support coordinator for the Fertility Center in Chattanooga and can be reached at 423.899.0500 or tina@myfertilitycenter.com. Tina speaks openly about her long struggle with infertility and hopes to encourage other women who have not yet become moms. Her two miracles are ages 8 and 10.