

# Fertility preservation provides hope for young cancer patients

FertilityAnswers

Cancer. It's a word that rocks the world of anyone on the receiving end of this diagnosis. After the initial shock, a patient's immediate thoughts are probably about how soon cancer treatment can begin. But what many women of child-bearing age don't think about before it's often too late is what chemotherapy, radiation and other cancer-killing medications may do to her future fertility.

"For female cancer patients, 40 to 80 percent become infertile after cancer treatment," says Dr. John Storment, medical director at FertilityAnswers, a multi-center fertility clinic with offices throughout Louisiana. "It is important that cancer patients are aware of the fertility preservation techniques available to those that want to have children in the future."

For women in their 20s and early 30s, this most often means using advanced cryopreservation (freezing) techniques to freeze a woman's oocytes (unfertilized eggs) to store for future use. During an egg-freezing cycle, a patient will go through many of the same steps that are involved in a typical in vitro fertilization cycle commonly used for women who are having fertility issues. These

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CRYSTAL CAUSEY,  
breast cancer survivor about her  
choice to have fertility treatment

steps include ovulation stimulation, ultrasound monitoring and egg retrieval. After egg retrieval, the eggs are cultured for a few hours and then frozen the same day.

Diagnosed this past June with a rare form of invasive ductal carcinoma breast cancer at age 33, Crystal Causey of Lafayette, elected to go through fertility preservation with the hope that one day she can have her own biological child. "I thought to myself, what if I do get married one day and am in a loving marriage and want to have kids, but then it's too late," Causey said.

Causey feels lucky to have found out about her cancer in the first place. She discovered the lump only after her gynecologist, Dr. James Zehnder, recommended she get a mammogram since her mother had breast cancer several years before. "Most doctors don't even refer you for breast screening until after age 40," Crystal said.

Due to her young age and the fact that she did not have any children, fertility preservation



Provided photo

Egg cryopreservation is one way young cancer survivors may be able to preserve their options to have their own biological children after treatment.

was recommended at the consultations with both her surgical and medical oncologists. Causey was then referred to Dr. Susan Conway, reproductive endocrinologist at FertilityAnswers in Lafayette. "I immediately felt at ease with Dr. Conway. She worked very closely with my oncologists to map out my treatment protocol and timeline to minimize the risk of waiting to treat my cancer."

About two weeks after her surgery to remove the almost 4-centimeter lump from her breast, Causey began her ovulation stimulation cycle, the first step for fertility preservation.

This involved taking hormones over several weeks to make her ovaries produce many egg follicles, all the while monitoring their development through ultrasounds. At retrieval, Conway was able to harvest 21 eggs, of which 17 were mature enough to be cryopreserved.

"It's very reassuring to know that I have options for my future," said Crystal after her fertility preservation cycle. "My desire to do fertility preservation was to keep all paths to motherhood open if possible, although I am open to adoption should that opportunity ever be available to me."



Provided photo

Crystal Causey, right, 33, of Lafayette, turned to FertilityAnswers to help preserve her future fertility during her breast cancer treatment. Among her supporters is her mother Lanell Causey, left, of Natchitoches.

Now in the middle of her radiation treatment, Causey has three pieces of wisdom for women her age. First is to get a wellness exam and ask your doctor if a mammogram is wise given your family history, no matter your age. Second, if you are diagnosed with cancer,

know you are not alone. She credits the many others out there with cancer for giving her the support she needed to endure.

"Lastly, I learned to make decisions about my treatment out of hope and not fear," Causey said.