

Frozen Embryo Transfer Cycle

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how to prepare and what to expect during a frozen embryo transfer cycle. It is important that you fully understand the cycle, so please read this handout carefully. Always feel free to ask any questions now and during your treatment.



Scan for a digital copy of this handout.

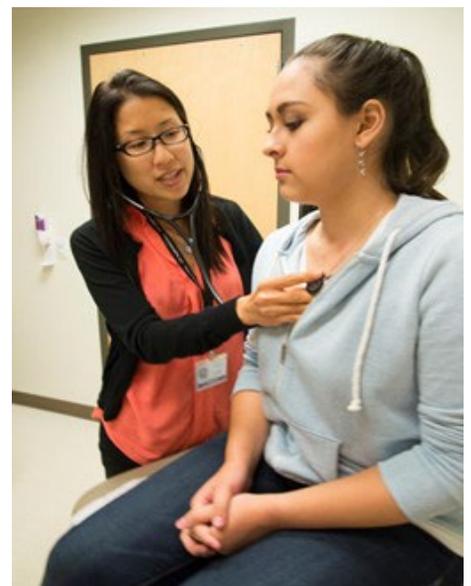
What is a frozen embryo transfer cycle?

A *frozen embryo transfer (FET) cycle* is a process to help you become pregnant. FET uses *embryos* (fertilized eggs) that have been frozen. During the FET cycle, your embryos are thawed and placed into your uterus. This is done at a time in your menstrual cycle that best supports a pregnancy.

In a *programmed FET cycle*, you will be given hormones to help your *endometrium* (lining of your uterus) accept the embryos. While you are taking the hormones, you will have blood tests and ultrasound exams to help us monitor how your body responds to hormone treatment.

- You will have **blood draws** from a vein in your arm. The blood samples are used to check your hormone levels.
- For your **transvaginal ultrasound exam**, an ultrasound probe is placed inside your vagina. The probe uses sound waves to check your uterus and ovaries. These images appear a screen in the exam room for your doctor to view and record.

Your care team will give you detailed instructions. Carefully follow all instructions to improve your chance of pregnancy success.



Talk with your doctor if you have any questions about your frozen embryo transfer cycle.

What happens before and during the FET cycle?

- Before a programmed FET cycle, you will typically take medication to reduce ovarian activity.
- After taking this medicine for at least 10 days, you will take the hormone *estradiol*, as a pill, injection, or patch. Estradiol helps prepare your endometrium to accept the embryo.
- A vaginal ultrasound will be done after you have used estradiol for about 2 weeks. This test will determine if your endometrium is thick enough for an embryo transfer.
- When your endometrium is at the right thickness, we will tell you to use the hormone progesterone. Progesterone is given as an injection into a muscle (*intramuscular*) or as a vaginal gel or pill. Your doctor will decide the best method for you.

- **Make sure you know exactly when to start the progesterone.** The timing is very important. It is related to when your frozen embryos will be thawed and transferred.
- Keep using estradiol and progesterone until we tell you to stop.
- When pregnant, you will keep using estradiol and progesterone until you are 10 weeks pregnant.
- In the case of a modified natural FET cycle, you will keep using progesterone until you are 8 weeks pregnant.

What happens to the embryos during this process?

Embryos are frozen at different times: day after fertilization (day 1), at *cleavage stage* (day 3), or when they become *blastocysts* (day 5).

Your embryos were frozen either one at a time or in groups. They were frozen inside small vials or straws. The number of vials or straws that will be thawed for the FET depends on:

- Your age at the time the embryos were frozen
- The quality of your embryos
- The number of embryos frozen in each vial or straw
- Other factors that were present when your embryos were frozen

Depending on when and how your embryos were frozen, they may need time to grow in the lab after thawing, before they can be placed into your uterus. Your team will tell you if extra steps are needed and how they affect your FET cycle. These extra steps, if needed, will add more cost.

We will thaw a certain number of embryos for transfer. This number is based on how many give you the highest chance of pregnancy but the lowest chance of *multiple gestation* (being pregnant with more than 1 baby at the same time). After talking with you, your provider will suggest the number of embryos to thaw and transfer.

What are the benefits of FET?

You might receive these benefits from FET:

- Pregnancy
- Being able to control how many embryos are transferred into your uterus

Please know that Center for Reproductive Health and Fertility (CRHF) doctors and staff **cannot** guarantee that:

- Any of the steps in the process will succeed
- The treatment process will result in pregnancy
- The pregnancy will result in delivery of a healthy full-term newborn

What risks or problems can occur with FET?

- It is possible that none of your frozen embryos will survive being frozen and thawed. This will mean there are no embryos to transfer.
- Using hormones such as estradiol may increase your risk of blood clots. If you get blood clots, you may need to take blood-thinning medicines (*anticoagulants*) for a few months. Very rarely, blood clots cause more serious problems such as *pulmonary embolus* (blood clots in the lungs), stroke, or even death.
- The embryo transfer procedure may cause some cramping, discomfort, and a small amount of bleeding. Rarely, infection occurs from the catheter. If this occurs, you may need antibiotics.
- *Multiple gestation* (being pregnant with more than 1 baby at the same time) is a risk of FET. This risk increases when more embryos are placed into your uterus.
- The risks of multiple gestation include:
 - You may have preterm (early) labor. Preterm labor and delivery may place you at higher risk for cesarean section, bleeding, and infection.
 - Your babies may be born premature and need intensive care.
 - Your babies may have long-term problems from being born too early. Or they may not survive.
- Problems may occur during pregnancy. Two of these problems are:
 - *Gestational diabetes*, which causes high blood sugar in the pregnant person and can affect the baby's health
 - *Preeclampsia*, a serious condition that includes a sudden rise in blood pressure
- Sometimes it takes longer than we expect for your endometrium to thicken after you start taking hormones. This may change the expected date of your FET. You may need extra hormones and more monitoring. This may add additional costs.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Center for Reproductive Health and Fertility:

Weekdays 8 am – 5 pm:
Call 206.598.4225

After hours, weekends, and holidays: Call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the CRHF provider on call.