



## SELECTING AN OVUM DONOR

by Shelley M. Tarnoff, JD, LMFT  
(LawSMT@aol.com)

Making the shift to ovum donation can be a challenging one. For many patients coming to terms with the loss of a genetic connection means letting go of a life long dream. Including a third party in family building efforts requires an adjustment, and selecting the “right donor” may be a daunting task. In many cases, Intended Parents look for a “sign” or a “bridge” to connect them to the donor who will be providing a most important genetic contribution. The connector may be red hair and freckles, a common interest in classical music, a wacky sense of humor or a love of the outdoors. Although the process of ovum donation may seem overwhelming at times, the difficulties fade away when you hold the child of your dreams in your arms. It is important to remember that creating a family through ovum donation may be second choice, but is never second best. Following is a list of criteria to consider when selecting an ovum donor:

**Matching Physical Characteristics:** Height, weight, eye color, ethnicity and hair color may be matched to increase the chances that the child will share physical characteristics with the Intended Parents.

**Education/Employment Background:** Reviewing a donor’s educational achievement and employment background can help assess a donor’s level of intelligence, responsibility and accomplishment. It should be remembered, however, that education may also be a function of opportunity.

**Interests:** Intended Parents may search for a donor who has shown an interest in sports, music, art, dance or foreign languages.

**Availability for Future Contact:** Some donors are willing to make themselves available for future contact with resulting offspring upon request. They may provide a social security number or other contact information to be used in the event of a medical emergency regarding the child.

**Medical Background:** While most of the donor’s health background is based on information that is self-reporting, the IVF physician will review any concerns regarding genetic components. Additionally, the screening mental health professional will evaluate any history of substance abuse, psychiatric treatment and family mental illness. Some agencies and medical facilities will require that donors have had a previous pregnancy. The IVF Physician may advise genetic testing if warranted.

**Previous Donation Cycles:** Information regarding ovarian stimulation, resulting pregnancies and cycle compliance may be available for repeat donors.

**Ability to Complete Program Requirements:** Will the donor be able to take time off work or school to attend necessary clinic appointments? If she has children, is childcare available as needed? Has the donor tolerated blood draws, injections and gynecological procedures well in the past?

**Resolution Regarding the Donation of Genetic Material:** A donor’s essay may address her resolve regarding the donation of genetic material. Most donors will draw a distinction between egg provider and the parent. “It takes much more than shared genetics to make a great parent.”

**Motivation:** While financial compensation is often a primary motivator, the donor may also be motivated by altruism. “I feel so badly for people who are unable to have children of their own. I am so grateful for my own children, I can imagine what a heartbreak this is.”

**Support from Partner:** Many agencies and clinics require the donor’s husband to consent to the ovum donation procedure. Also, the donor’s partner may need to complete screening for sexually transmitted diseases and agree to a period of abstinence from sexual relations.