

Jewish Religious Considerations

While PGT provides tremendous support for patients building their families, some individuals may struggle with certain aspects of the process from personal values to religious considerations. It is important to remember that this is a very personal decision and is not a requirement for all individuals looking to grow their family. Please reach out to your local rabbi or spiritual leader if any of the following questions resonate with you or if you have additional questions and concerns regarding PGT.

1. If PGT enables choosing unaffected embryos, doesn't it interfere with nature?

The Torah teaches that someone with the ability to provide medical care is not only permitted but obligated to heal a patient with a medical condition. With the tremendous strides that technology and genetic testing have made, many Rabbis apply this same concept and do not consider utilizing medical biotechnology to be an interference with nature. An individual who plans to use IVF and PGT to prevent a life-threatening or debilitating genetic disorder is considered to be an "ill person" according to Jewish law and would therefore necessitate medical intervention, even if it seemingly "interferes" with nature.

2. How far does the obligation process of PGT extend? What if I am not interested in the process or do not want to for personal reasons?

- If an individual carries a genetic mutation that is life-threatening, such as *BRCA1* or *BRCA2*, this may require additional consideration and discussion with the rabbinic or spiritual leader. As previously discussed, there is a biblical commandment to provide medical care to an individual who is ill. This especially applies to an individual who has a life-threatening condition. Some rabbis maintain that it applies to unborn individuals as well, but others disagree and do not feel that PGT is the only option to prevent a pregnancy with a genetic disorder.
- PGT is a powerful tool that can help patients and couples looking to build their families but is not an obligation when pursuing IVF. An individual should consider the emotional, financial, and physical costs before proceeding and know that there are other ways to grow a family, including adoption and surrogacy if they are not interested or desire to proceed with PGT.
- It is worthwhile to discuss your concerns with a reproductive specialist, healthcare team, and your local rabbi or spiritual leader to determine if PGT is right for you and your family.

3. What if I do IVF and PGT and have remaining embryos? Am I permitted to discard them? Does it matter if they are affected with the *BRCA* mutation?

According to Talmudic law, an embryo is considered to be "water" or fluid for forty days after the time of conception. While there are many religious implications for this statement, it also demonstrates that without successful implantation in the uterus, an embryo is not capable of developing past a certain point. This is especially informative for embryos created via IVF and PGT, as the Rabbis ruled that an unused embryo may be discarded, whether affected with a gene mutation or not since it will not develop into a fetus unless deliberately transferred with the intention of pregnancy. As always, please reach out to your local rabbi or spiritual guide to discuss this matter further.

4. What are some additional religious considerations to discuss with a rabbi or other spiritual guide?

While the PGT process can include many considerations for a patient, some individuals may also find additional considerations to discuss further with a religious leader.

- **Supervision** - According to some rabbis, there is an additional level of protection warranted during the IVF process involved with PGT that includes having a religious representative oversee embryo development in the laboratory. These individuals are trained in both religious law and reproductive medicine to ensure that all religious protocols are adhered to while confirming everything is completed with the correct biological samples. Because the cells used for the embryo biopsy will not be transferred to the uterus at any point, no additional supervision is needed for the PGT stage, only for the IVF stage.
- **Sex Selection** - With all types of PGT, it is possible to know the sex of the embryo by looking at the chromosomes. Some individuals have no preference for the sex of their child and prefer to be surprised, while others may have a personal preference. In the event that a patient decides to proceed with PGT, sex selection may be a helpful topic to discuss with a religious leader to determine some options for proceeding.
- **Donor Samples / Surrogacy** - Some patients choose to use an egg or sperm donor or even a surrogate to proceed with IVF and PGT if there are other medical or fertility considerations, beyond a genetic mutation. This can also present some considerations to be discussed with a religious leader.
 - **Jewish Lineage** - An individual is considered Jewish by law if their mother is Jewish. There are debates in Jewish law if this is based on who contributes the biological material for conception, where the fetus develops, and who births the child (SOURCE). If an egg donor or surrogate is used, this may be an additional point to consider.
 - **Kohain** - Some Jewish males can trace their ancestry through their father back to Aaron the Priest and are considered members of the priestly family. Because this is traced through the father, there may be some concerns that any offspring that is conceived through IVF and PGT may not retain this special status.