

## Why Is Egg Freezing on the Rise?

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More and more Emirati women are choosing to freeze their eggs in order to be able to have children without complications later in life. According to a news report from Al Arabiya, industry experts have noticed a “significant” increase in oocyte cryopreservation, which is the technical term given to the procedure.

The upsurge is believed to be down to a number of factors. The recently relaxed laws surrounding the practice in the UAE have made it more accessible to Emirati women, while scientific advances have also made the procedure more effective and more attractive. Meanwhile, changing lifestyles and attitudes have also contributed to a greater uptake of the practice.

### What is oocyte cryopreservation?

Oocyte cryopreservation is the technical term for egg freezing. After undergoing a programme of controlled hormone treatment for up to 10 days, the woman’s eggs are extracted and cryogenically frozen. Then, when she is ready to have children, they can be thawed and fertilized with the father’s sperm, then incubated in the lab for a number of days before being placed into the woman’s womb, which has been prepped for the transition through another course of hormone stimulation.

The treatment was originally developed in the 1980s as a means for women undergoing medical procedures which might affect their fertility, such as chemotherapy. However, it has since morphed into more commonly being an elective process, wherein women who are not ready to have children (due to work commitments, relationship problems or other reasons) can postpone the decision until later in life.

### Sign of the times

In December 2019, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan announced legislative changes to the regulations surrounding in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment. Previously, it was only permissible to freeze unfertilized eggs from a married woman. The new law, which came into effect the following month, made it permissible for single and married women to freeze human embryos for a period of up to five years, which is extendable upon request.

The decision to freeze eggs has become less of a taboo subject in recent years, as well. Celebrities such as Jennifer Aniston have talked openly about their regret at not doing so, while the narrowing of the gender divide in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has meant women now have greater opportunities in the workplace.

## Advancing science

The technology surrounding the process has improved dramatically in recent years. More rapid freezing techniques have meant that 90% of eggs now survive the process, compared to 60% prior. This, alongside a higher number of specialists and more sophisticated storage, means that there is now little risk associated with egg freezing.

What's more, non-conventional methods have also been developed. Vaginal extraction involves a risk of damaging the hymen, which is of serious concern to single, unmarried women who have not lost their virginity. However, the advent of abdominal or rectal extraction means that this is no longer such a difficult issue.