



THE CENTER FOR FAMILY BUILDING

Choosing an Egg Donor

BY LISA SCHUMAN

The decision to choose a donor can feel enormous. After all, you are choosing genetics for your future child. There can be worries, fears and typically confusion about how to choose. So where do you begin?

When individuals and couples look at a picture of an egg donor it's common to hear, "she looks my sister" or "I was also athletic when I was a child." It's also natural to want to replace yourself or choose characteristics you wish you possessed. With this in mind, it's understandable why so many people look for a donor with the perfect SAT scores or for someone who has movie star looks.

These choices are driven by emotion. I would not suggest that you disregard your desire to feel some connection with the donor. A connection is important. However, it also makes sense to be practical.

It's not possible to choose temperament, as any parent will tell you, and extreme intellect is not necessarily inheritable either. This can be difficult to accept. Having children is such an intimate experience and feeling that your children can be different than you or different than the child you imagined can feel upsetting. The loss you can feel is very personal and carries a different meaning for everyone. Accepting this is important but it is also useful to accept that there are practical issues to consider when choosing a donor. It can be a relief to understand that although you cannot choose your children's genetics, you can try to stack the odds for desirable traits in your favor.



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Remember that you are not only choosing an egg donor, you are selecting a person from whom your child will inherit half of her DNA – and this DNA is not always represented in the egg donor. The donor can have blonde hair and blue eyes but if she has three red-haired brothers, you may have a red-haired child. If she is tall but everyone in her family is short, you are not really choosing tall genes. It's understandable to be drawn to an egg donor because she is funny or has an advanced degree but since these attributes are not necessarily inheritable, you may be focusing on things you cannot control and losing sight of information that may be more useful.

Medical history is also more tangible than temperament or IQ. Everyone wants a healthy donor. But you can look beyond basic health. Everyone has some difficulty in their family. It's rare for everyone in a family to die from old age, never wear glasses, and have no asthma. If you can identify the medical issues in the donor's family and check to ensure that the genetically linked parent does not have the same difficulties in his family, you will not be replicating difficulties for your child.

You are your child's parent. There is no question about that. But your child will have genetics that will be connected to someone outside the family. In the age of the internet, your child may be able to find valuable information about his genetics with the touch of a keypad. This information may give your child all the medical assistance he needs. However, in choosing a donor with the emotional AND the practical issues in mind, you will have the opportunity to not just provide your child with information, but you may be able to lower the risk of family medical issues for your child.

Often parents to be become frustrated in the process of building their families. When people feel frustrated, it is natural to think emotionally about decisions. Emotions are important and need to be valued, but accepting the things you can control and making decisions based on useful information may provide you with a better chance of achieving your desired outcome.