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Pregnancy After Cancer

According to Fertilehope.org, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fertility issues for young cancer survivors, around 120,000 men and women under age 45 will be diagnosed with cancer this year. With cancer survival rates increasing, fertility issues remain a concern.

In June 2006, The American Society of Clinical Oncology published new guidelines that encourage oncologists to address fertility issues as early as possible as part of patient education and informed consent, allowing patients to explore with specialists existing options such as sperm and embryo cryo-preservation — freezing embryos for later use — before beginning treatment. To read the full recommendations go to www.jco.org/cgi/content/abstract/24/18/2917.

With 25 percent of breast cancer patients under the age of 45, fertility is of special concern, particularly since new research suggests that pregnancy between six months and two years after breast cancer will not impact survival, and for those who wait 24 months to become pregnant it may actually have a protective effect. In the study, published in the British Medical Journal, 123 women who became pregnant up to two years after treatment showed improved overall survival compared with women who did not get pregnant — with the protective effect most clearly evident for those who waited at least two years to get pregnant.