

Perk Up: Facebook and Apple Now Pay for Women to Freeze Eggs

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Two Silicon Valley giants now offer women a game-changing perk: Apple and Facebook will pay for employees to freeze their eggs. The firms appear to be the first major employers to offer this coverage for non-medical reasons.

“Having a high-powered career and children is still a very hard thing to do,” said Brigitte Adams, an egg-freezing advocate and founder of the patient forum Eggsurance.com. By offering this benefit, companies are investing in women, she said, and supporting them in carving out the lives they want.

When successful, egg freezing allows women to put their fertility on ice, so to speak, until they’re ready to become parents. But the procedure comes at a steep price: costs typically add up to at least \$10,000 for every round, plus \$500 or more annually for storage.

With notoriously male-dominated Silicon Valley firms competing to attract top female talent, the coverage may give Apple and Facebook a leg up among the many women who devote key childbearing years to building careers. Women at Facebook began taking advantage of the coverage this year.

Why freeze?

Fertility doctors in New York and San Francisco report that egg-freezing cases have nearly doubled over the past year.

Egg freezing has been described as a key to “leveling the playing field” between men and women: Without the crushing pressure of a ticking biological clock, women have more freedom in making life choices, say advocates. A Bloomberg Businessweek magazine cover story earlier this year asked: Will freezing your eggs free your career? “Not since the birth control pill has a medical technology had such potential to change family and career planning,” wrote author Emma Rosenblum.

New ground

Companies may be concerned about the public relations implications of the benefit – in the most cynical light, egg-freezing coverage could be viewed as a ploy to entice women to sell their souls to their employer, sacrificing childbearing years for the promise of promotion.

“Would potential female associates welcome this option knowing that they can work hard early on and still reproduce, if they so desire, later on?” asked Glenn Cohen, from Harvard Law School. “Or would they take this as a signal that the firm thinks that working there as an associate and pregnancy are incompatible?”

“The attitude toward egg freezing is very different,” and more positive, than just a few years ago, said Christy Jones, founder of Extend Fertility, a company that offers and promotes egg freezing across the country. Women are making the proactive decision to freeze their eggs at a younger age, and the choice is “more one of empowerment than ‘this is my last chance.’”

‘Back to work the next day’

After about ten days of fertility drug injections, patients undergo a relatively short outpatient procedure – and they’re “back to work the next day,” said a Stanford Professor of Obstetrics.

Will the perk pay off for companies? The benefit will likely encourage women to stay with their employer longer, cutting down on recruiting and hiring costs. And practically speaking, when women freeze their eggs early, firms may save on pregnancy costs in the long run, said Westphal. A woman could avoid paying to use a donor egg down the road, for example, or undergoing more intensive fertility treatments when she’s ready to have a baby.

But the emotional and cultural payoff may be more valuable, said Jones: Offering this benefit “can help women be more productive human beings.”

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