

HEALTH | FITNESS

THE FACTS ABOUT FERTILITY

Sam Beau Patrick, the Health Queen, provides a rundown on the basics behind fertility.

As many Australians head into work today for a normal days work, some will be visiting their specialist to hear the news that they are infertile. And, unfortunately, over the next few years more Australians are going to be dealt this news.

In the year 2000, one in ten couples trying to fall pregnant were declared infertile. Ten years along, in 2010, this number had nearly doubled to one in six. With current trends and research indicators, infertility in Australian couples could affect as many as one in three couples by 2020.

Infertility is diagnosed when conception has not occurred after 12 months of unprotected intercourse. And in this country, in such an instance, couples are able to receive fertility assistance in the form of IVF under Medicare.

So, is this a good thing or not?

I believe it is definitely a good thing if the couples are over 35 years old, have been living a healthy lifestyle and are have been having intercourse at the right time of the month with no success. These couples warrant investigating to determine why they can't conceive, and possibly to get a diagnosis and treatment plan. Baring in mind, that a combination of medical intervention and natural medicine often produces the best results (e.g., medical plus acupuncture and naturopathy).

On the other hand, I do believe that IVF has become too readily available for couples who have an unrealistic expectation about falling pregnant, or who are lacking the fundamental knowledge about conception. For example, some couples want to become pregnant in a specific time-frame to fit in with their careers, holidays, lifestyle etc". Unfortunately this is a social-driven reason, not necessarily a physical reason to have IVF.

The other area of concern, is the lack of basic education offered to couples about fertility. Many are turning up at IVF clinics as potential candidates, when really all they need is someone to sit down with them and explain where and when they are 'fertile' during their menstrual cycle.

To validate my point, two Melbourne IVF clinics conducted a study and found that only 13 per cent of women had a good understanding of when they were fertile in their cycle, with 53 per cent having a poor understanding and 11 per cent with no understanding at all! This research is alarming, as doctors are referring couples to IVF clinics without first assessing or supplying basic education, and are also installing a fear of 'infertility' into their minds, when many may not be.

In case you are a bit rusty on when is the best time to try for a baby, here is a quick explanation about when a woman is most fertile during her menstrual cycle.

Day 1 of the cycle is the first day of the woman's period. The average woman will hatch an egg (ovulate) around the 14th day, which will survive for up to a week, but is best for 48 hours, so this is when insemination needs to occur. Many women ovulate earlier than 14 days and many are late ovulators. To determine whether you are ovulating, a doctor can do a blood test for Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) in the early part of your cycle. There are many home kits designed to pick up changes in your hormones to let you know if you are ovulating. Other reliable signs are vaginal secretions, which change from being a normal milky or clear fluid with mushy consistency, to egg white consistency and very slimy. Temperature increases; a slight pain on one side; increased libido, a pimple or tears, are also other subtle signs that you may be ovulating.

Some facts for women:

- Anovulation (due to PCOS) or a missing ovary or other endocrine issue is the cause of infertility in around 25 per cent of cases (see next edition for more information on PCOS or visit www.byebyebriidget.com).
- Tubal damage, caused by chlamydia, gluten allergies or other food allergies, pelvic inflammatory disease, or trauma – for example – can account for 10 to 20 per cent of infertility cases.
- Endometriosis and estrogen dominance issues contribute in approximately 30 per cent of cases. With other factors (e.g., no sex, fibroids, cervical issues, unexplained issues) account for one to five per cent of cases.

What many people may not realise is that many of the above factors can be improved with better lifestyle, cleaner diets and/or an increase in physical activity (with trauma being the exception); even to the point where IVF may not be necessary.

HOT TIPS for women:

- Exercise daily. Try to view exercising as a wonderful way to gain health and improve energy, this way it will become a part of your fabric.
- Eat organic fruit and vegetables (commercially grown produce in Australia has many chemicals, pesticides and herbicides that can interfere with fertility)
- Manage work and stressors better (there are some great tools to help you re-dress stress on the www.byebyebriidget.com site)
- Steer away from foods in packets, including pre-mix rice, pastas, meals etc. Chose fresh and natural where possible
- Find out your hormone levels. If you are concerned that you may have a hormone imbalance, find someone who specializes in this area (someone who is holistic is best) or conduct your own home discovery kit from the www.byebyebriidget.com site

Sperm defects, dysfunction or DNA damage in males can contribute to 50-70% of infertility cases. Some other factors affecting men include:

- Age plays a significant role , like women, sperm integrity starts to decline with age
- Lifestyle choices impact a lot on sperm, such as smoking, alcohol, poor diet, lack of exercise, toxins and radiation
- Research is now indicating that men working with laptop or computers on their laps may kill sensitive sperm.

Other tips for men:

- Avoid carrying your phone in their hip pocket
- Wear loose fitting underwear such as boxer shorts (loose undies are better as sperm need to be kept cool and not warmed against the body).

- Sperm take 120 days from production to ejaculation, so any changes to lifestyle changes won't be evident for three months. Start the changes today lads!

Next edition we will discuss PCOS more indepth as it is a growing condition in Australia and is the main cause for infertility in Australian Women. In the meantime, have fun exercising, eating better and trying to fall pregnant!

Sam Beau Patrick, RN, ND, Author

With formal training in critical care nursing, naturopathy, nutrition and pharmaceuticals, Sam Beau Patrick – The Health Queen – has worked with over 24,000 individuals, doctors and corporate groups. On national television she regularly referred to as Australia's leading female hormone expert. For more information on fertility and other health issues go to www.byebybridget.com (female hormones) or www.healthqueen.com.au for other health programs.