

heal women

IVF still remains a viable treatment option for many childless couples.
PICTURE FROM ONDINFERTILITY.COM

Beating the biological clock

A WOMAN'S fertility is affected as she grows older as fertility decreases with age, starting its decline in the early 20s. After a woman reaches 25 years, the decline accelerates and takes a deep dive after age 35.

Every woman has a different ovarian reserve, a pool of eggs present in the ovaries. As a woman grows older, her ovaries age as well. A low ovarian reserve results in an insufficient number of eggs to ensure a reasonable chance of pregnancy.

Some women are more fertile because they have a better ovarian reserve, which may be hereditary. Others may be infertile due to hereditary endometriosis, uterine fibroids and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

TYPES OF INFERTILITY

There are two types of infertility: primary and secondary infertility.

Primary infertility occurs when couples fail to conceive after a year of regular unprotected sexual intercourse. Secondary infertility is when couples are unable to conceive a second child.

Identifying the cause of infertility is important to ensure the most effective treatment. The approach to infertility requires an efficient and complete initial evaluation. It begins with a detailed history and a complete physical examination of both partners including semen analysis, assessment of ovulation and tubal patency test.

Next, all the information gathered must be evaluated to determine the possible cause of the infertility problem. After that, the physician implements a plan to assess factors necessary to achieve a successful pregnancy.

Knowing the cause of their infertility can help women choose options that best suit their situation, writes Dr Tan Jui Seng

With the advancement in technology and infertility treatments, there are now several options for couples to choose from depending on the infertility cause. These options include Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI), Gamete Intrafallopian Transfer (GIFT), Zygote Intrafallopian Transfer (ZIFT) and In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

MOST POPULAR

IVF is one of the most popular treatments that couples opt for because it has the highest success rate. The IVF process involves ovary stimulation, egg and sperm retrieval, fertilisation and embryo transfer. It is essentially designed for women with ovulation disorders, premature ovarian failure, and uterine fibroids, or men with low sperm count or sperm motility.

However, with the increased availability of IVF services, it is now a treatment option for many other conditions. These include unexplained infertility, ovulatory problems, endometriosis, or when other fertility treatments have failed.

One of the misconceptions is that IVF can address late pregnancy. IVF is not an elixir for infertility because its success rate also depends on the infertility issue and quality of eggs. As women age, the quality and quantity of eggs decreases, which in turn reduces the success rates.

Certain lifestyle factors also negatively impact treatment such as consumption of alcohol, smoking, being overweight or underweight and stress. Stress causes

hormonal imbalance and metabolic disorders which affect a woman's ovulation.

Every fertility journey has an element of uncertainty. Yet, millions of healthy babies have been born with the help of IVF and it still remains a viable treatment option for many childless couples who are struggling to get pregnant on their own.

LATE-STAGE PREGNANCY

In recent years, women have frozen their eggs to ensure that they can still conceive after going through intensive medical procedures such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. It also serves as a backup plan for starting a family in case of any unforeseen circumstances. Freezing their eggs in their 20s and 30s can enable women to conceive more easily as compared to when they get older, or following serious health issues.

A woman can carry a pregnancy well into her late 40s without any issue. However, a later-age pregnancy may have other complications that are detrimental to the health of the mother and child. Risks associated with those over the age of 50 include an increased incidence of high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, risk of pre-term delivery and caesarean section.

In addition, the risk of chromosomal abnormalities is much higher in late age pregnancies. Babies born to older mothers have a higher risk of problems such as Down Syndrome.

There is also the risk of pregnancy loss by miscarriage and stillbirth which increases as a woman gets older, perhaps due to pre-existing medical conditions or foetal chromosomal abnormalities.



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Dr Tan Jui Seng has more than 10 years of experience in fertility treatment.