

Healthwatch

Edited by KAMAHL COGDON

OZFACT

Victoria has the nation's oldest new mums, at an average age of 31

Naturally pregnant

IVF is not the only path Australia's growing band of infertile couples is taking to parenthood.

While medical intervention is producing more pregnancies than ever, many couples are opting for a more natural approach.

They are popping vitamins and minerals, swallowing natural elixirs, balancing their body's inner energy, ridding the laundry cupboard of chemicals and turning off microwaves and mobile phones.

Natural fertility specialist Doreen Schwegler said the aim was to maximise the health of prospective parents, which in turn improved the health of the eggs and sperm they produced and boosted the chances of a healthy pregnancy and baby.

The Essendon-based naturopath said her natural fertility therapy had helped more than 200 couples, including many who had been considered infertile or had had fertility problems.

But Prof Gab Kovacs, from Monash IVF, is not convinced about natural therapy's benefits.

"I'm not saying it is not any good, but there is no evidence to support that it does work," Prof Kovacs said.

Kamahl Cogdon

Prof Kovacs said that while there was plenty of anecdotal evidence of success, such therapies had not been tested under rigorous scientific conditions.

He said some natural therapists took advantage of a couple's desperation to have a baby and those with concerns about fertility would be better consulting a doctor.

"Often it's more expensive to buy the herbs and see the natural therapist than to come and see a reproductive gynaecologist," he said.

Fertility problems are rising in Australia, with one in six couples suffering from infertility.

With the average age of new mothers now hovering above 30, women's fertility is lowered when they start trying to fall pregnant and they have less time in which to conceive.

Men, who are just as likely as women to be the cause of conception problems, are producing less sperm and of lower quality overall.

Ms Schwegler believes that our lifestyle and environment are partly to blame.

"I think it's because there is

more electromagnetic radiation, and more pesticides and chemicals in our food and water," she said. "We're also under more stress."

Ms Schwegler, a scientist who had 20 years' lab experience before turning to naturopathy, said she had a better-than-50 per cent success rate in helping couples overcome fertility problems.

Prof Kovacs said 33.7 per cent of the almost 4000 embryo transfers conducted by Monash IVF across the nation resulted in pregnancy.

Ms Schwegler said her therapies were individually designed based on results of a host of tests, including screening for heavy metals, which could affect a developing fetus, screening for urinary tract infections, checks for gut or digestion problems, and checks of the body's level of zinc, which, among other things, was essential for healthy sperm and fetal growth.

A comprehensive health appraisal was also done to help identify which supplements, treatments and other measures were needed.



Supplements: Mardie MacDonald with children Amity, Tilley and James. Picture: ELLEN SMITH

Belief beat scepticism

ELTHAM mother of three Mardie MacDonald is one of the anecdotal success stories of natural fertility therapy.

The polycystic ovarian syndrome sufferer was put on various herbs and minerals, encouraged to exercise regularly, eat low GI foods and avoid using the microwave because it emitted electromagnetic radiation.

Ms MacDonald lost 14kg weight gained as a result of her condition. Her periods became regular and she and husband Alastair conceived their first child within eight months.

Despite the scepticism of her husband and her obstetrician, Ms MacDonald, 33, said she believed she had the natural treatments to thank for her children, Tilly, 5, Amity, 3, and James, five months.

Winchelsea mum Arlene Pilson is another polycystic ovarian syndrome sufferer with a firm belief in natural therapy.

Ms Pilson, 38, endured five failed attempts at IVF.

She fell pregnant with daughter Alannah, now 13 weeks old, six

months after turning to natural therapy. Ms Pilson took herbs to bring on her periods, which had always been irregular because of her condition, a multi-vitamin, magnesium, folic acid and fish oil.

Bowen therapy, where the therapist uses light touches and gentle rolling motions to relax the body and realign energy, was also part of the treatment.

Ms Pilson estimated she spent about \$3000 on natural therapy in the six months before conceiving and during her pregnancy.

While expensive, she said it was a small price to pay for baby Alannah and did not compare with the \$8000 she and husband David spent on IVF treatment.

Natural therapy was also more personal and less stressful than IVF, Ms Pilson said.

"With IVF you are just a number," she said. "They don't treat you as an individual."

"They treat everybody the same."

"And that wasn't helping me or doing anything to address the condition I had."

- Kamahl Cogdon

CHECK UP

Depression link to birth

GIRLS who weigh less than 2.5kg at birth could face a higher risk of teenage depression.

US researchers found almost 40 per cent of girls in the 1993 Great Smoky Mountains Study who were born below 2.5kg experienced at least one episode of depression between the ages of 13 and 16.

On average, 23.5 per cent of low-birth-weight girls were depressed each year.

By comparison, just 8 per cent of those born at normal weights suffered at least one depressive episode and an average 3.4 per cent had depression each year.

Cold virus to tackle cancer

THE common cold virus is about to be tested as a weapon against cancer.

Australian studies have found the coxsackie virus can kill cancer cells in a test tube and in mice but leaves normal tissue largely unaffected.

Researchers are to test a purified form of the virus, trademarked Cavatak, in human patients with late-stage breast cancer, melanoma and prostate cancer who have not responded to conventional treatments.

Get-together on infertility

A COCKTAIL party to raise awareness about infertility is being held for couples, their family and friends.

Infertility expert Dr Lyndon Hale and natural fertility specialist Doreen Schwegler will be among the speakers.

The event is at Essendon Football Club, 7pm next Friday. Tickets, \$30.

Contact Andrea Henrickson on 0423 777 137 or andreaacraig@ozemail.com.au.

MEDIWEB

www.alldegreesofhealth.com.au
Information on natural fertility therapy