

pregnancy & new baby

why is fertility treatment becoming more common?

By Dr Andrew Murray

When parents of Generation X, the so-called "Baby Boomers", started having children in the late 1960s to early 70s, the average fertility rate was around three children per couple, and the average age of mothers was 24. Now Gen X is having the kids, and the fertility rate is less than two children per couple with the average age of mothers between 30 and 35.

The reasons for this are not hard to understand. More women are participating in tertiary education and many couples need double incomes. We are also living in a society where the norm has been to save for a house deposit, establish a career, and then have kids "when I'm financially secure". However, fertility declines significantly with age. Women, and their partners, need to take

these factors into account when making choices about balancing careers, finances, and having children. This is highlighted in the table below which shows the monthly chance of getting pregnant versus age:

Woman's age	Monthly chance of pregnancy	Monthly chance of pregnancy ending in live birth
34 or younger	26%	22%
35-37	22%	14%
38-39	17%	10%
40-41	12%	7%
42 or older	8%	4%

The most eggs a woman ever has are before she is born. About half way through her own gestation, she will have seven million eggs, but from there, it's all downhill. By birth, she will have one million eggs; by puberty, 300,000; and by her mid-30s, maybe 25,000 left. It still sounds like a lot, but the other issue is that women tend to ovulate their best eggs when they are younger. The older women get, the greater the chance of a genetic problem in the egg. This largely explains the numbers shown in the table.

Fertility treatments try to overcome this by increasing the chances of an egg and sperm getting together. This could start with

something as simple as Clomiphene (a tablet designed to help women release more eggs), through to IVF where egg and sperm are brought together in the lab, and subsequent embryo quality can be examined, leading to selection of the strongest, most viable embryo. The average chance of a baby from one cycle of IVF is now 45%.

If you are having trouble getting pregnant, the good news is that fertility clinics like Fertility Associates are in the best position to help you. But you need to take action sooner rather than later to ensure a greater chance of success.

www.fertilityassociates.co.nz