

A natural alternative to IVF

Infertile couples now get one free go at IVF on the NHS, but could complementary therapies be a safer and more effective alternative?

By HELEN CARROLL

LAST month's announcement that the NHS would offer one free IVF cycle to all women under 40 was widely hailed as good news. But many still believe the treatment can be dangerous. And complementary practitioners worry that couples will now choose this route before trying safer, more natural methods to help them conceive.

For starters, IVF does not guarantee success, giving only a one in five chance of having a baby. Added to that are the health risks associated with so-called "test tube babies", both for the mother and the child.

One in five women taking high doses of fertility drugs suffer ovarian-hyperstimulation - a potentially deadly condition. And a question mark still hangs over a possible link between IVF drugs and breast and ovarian cancer.

IVF (where thousands of sperm and a number of eggs are put in a test tube) and ICSI (a single sperm injected into each egg) are two of the UK's most popular infertility treatments.

But a recent study found roughly twice the rate of birth defects in babies born following IVF and ICSI treatment, compared to a group of 4,000 naturally conceived children.

So what are the alternatives? Here, three women who finally managed to conceive thanks to complementary treatments tell their stories.



GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT: Jo with baby Tom
Pictures: CHRIS GRIEVE

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Jo Thornton, 39, is married to Andrew, 38, and lives in Surrey. After seven years of trying for a baby, she fell pregnant with Tom, one, after changing her diet. Jo says...

WE'N Andrew and I married nine years ago we both wanted a family.

When I was 35, and we'd been trying for four years, my GP referred me for a scan. It showed I had endometriosis and fibroids in my womb. The combination of the two made me infertile.

At 36, I underwent my first IVF cycle. When it failed I was devastated. We had a further two unsuccessful IVF attempts. It was a dreadful rollercoaster ride of emotions. By 2001, we had spent £11,000 trying to conceive and time was running out.

When I consulted a nutritionist and told her about my fertility problems she said she would try to help. She prescribed a pre-natal multi-nutrient

Dietary changes gave us the baby we longed for

supplement containing zinc, manganese and chromium. I had to cut down on yeast, wheat and dairy and eat eight portions of fruit and vegetables a day. She also prescribed the hormone-balancing herb agnus castus.

When my period was late I bought a pregnancy test and refused to believe it when it was positive. We couldn't believe that, after all we'd gone through, a simple change in nutrition was the answer to our prayers.

Tom was born last year and parenthood is everything we both dreamed it would be.

Expert opinion: Nutritionist Penny Crowther explains: "Nutrition plays a vital role in enabling reproduction to take place. The herb agnus castus acts on the pituitary gland which controls the hormonal system and can help boost fertility. I recommended that Jo cut out wheat and dairy for a while to give her digestive system a break and allow her body to focus on conceiving."