

ISSUE #57 SUMMER 2020

AFFINITY

THE MAGAZINE FROM FERTILITY NETWORK UK

RAINBOW (JASON-LEUNG)





"I've cried so many times over my infertility but never more than in the last few months. I am a key worker myself and have family working for the NHS. My husband tries to be supportive. He is grieving too. I hope I will be mother to his child."

"After almost four years TTC and three miscarriages, we were so relieved to have our first appointment at our clinic in February. The doctors agreed that we should go straight to IVF. No time to waste. We decided to self fund a round and go on the NHS waitlist. Our self funded cycle of IVF would start in a matter of weeks.

I have been through many emotions since the closure of our clinic. I feel guilty and selfish for being upset about it. I've cried so many times over my infertility but never more than in the last few months. I am a key worker myself and have family working for the NHS. My husband tries to be supportive. He is grieving too. I hope I will be mother to his child.

The clock is ticking loud and clear. Perhaps a little more for me than others in this position. During the lockdown I turned 40. Now every TTCer worth their salt knows the chart - the one that shows your chances of a successful pregnancy fall off a cliff around this age. It has made the whole situation particularly cruel. So close yet so far. I am angry at all the wasted time. All the months in between appointments at infertility clinics, recurrent miscarriage clinics, gynaecology clinics and the countless GP appointments it took to get to those clinics in the first place.

I have found solace and humour in podcasts such as Big Fat Negative and Infertile AF. I've been taking supplements and getting exercise. I have reread some fertility books. The Fertility Network have been running yoga classes. It helps to feel part of a community. All of that can't stop time though so hopefully I'll get a call soon and be heading back to my clinic." -

Jane, Ninewells, Dundee.

Hello and welcome to the Summer edition of Affinity Fertility Network's magazine.

Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on so many people within our community. We know this is a challenging time for everyone, and inevitably it was incredibly disappointing when all treatment was postponed. Even with clinics reopening this will pose challenges with a reduced service being delivered across the country. We understand how frustrated, lonely, and isolated you may feel if you are unable to get on with treatment when time may feel so crucial. It is only natural to feel upset.

We have been looking at the best ways to continue to help you through these difficult times, and have a whole range of different options to help you to access the type of emotional support and information that you may need.

Our peer support groups are digital for now and are open to everyone. The TTC Webinars have been really popular providing great information on different subjects and some sessions directly aimed to help with health and wellbeing. As well as staff in all countries of the UK, our lovely, Diane, retired fertility nurse is available to give information and support on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 10am and 4pm. You can contact Diane on 0121 323 5025 or email her at support@fertilitynetworkuk.org and benefit from her wealth experience in this area.

Remember that however tough everything seems at the moment; we are here to help you in any way we can. We have an amazing team who are dedicated to supporting you so email, phone, text, use FB messenger - or even pigeon post - to get in touch with us. We are your charity; we are here for you and #YouAreNotAlone.

Very best wishes

Gwenda,
Fertility Network CEO.



Female fertility *evaluation:*

YOUR OPTIONS FOR TUBAL PATENCY ASSESSMENT



Infertility can have a number of causes such as Fallopian tubes or uterine abnormalities, endometriosis, ovulation factors, or problems with semen. Sometimes, it may be unexplained. **Tubal Patency Assessment** is one test that may be offered as part of the female fertility evaluation.

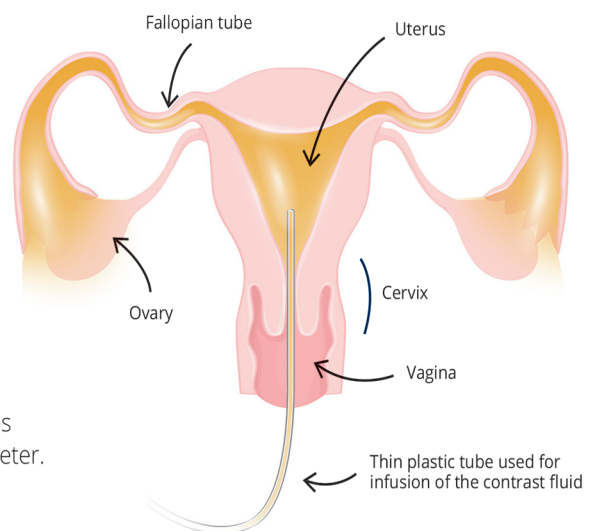
Scans for fertility testing are done to provide information on the uterus and whether the fallopian tubes are open or blocked. The type of scan offered varies depending on equipment, individual patient characteristics and physician preference.

✓ *Hysterosalpingogram (HSG)*

A contrast fluid is introduced into the uterine cavity via a catheter (thin plastic tube) to visualise the uterus and fallopian tubes using x-rays.

✓ *Sonohysterosalpingography (sonoHSG)*

An ultrasound technique (called HyFoSy or HyCoSy) that involves introducing a contrast material into the uterine cavity via a catheter.



ASK YOUR DOCTOR FOR INFORMATION ON WHICH TUBAL PATENCY ASSESSMENT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOU

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OUR MIRACLES BY KELLY WATERS

Our Journey started in 2013 when we decided to start a family, we tried naturally but it just didn't work. I had a feeling early on that we would have to go down a different route, I don't know why, it was just a feeling I had. The doctor referred me to Ocean Suite in Derriford. We didn't realise it then but this is where our Miracles would be made.

When we first arrived, we met so many lovely nurses and Doctor A (Dr Achaya) who was going to play a vital part in our journey,

I had a dye test which had shown I had blocked tubes. I had a laparoscopy so Dr A could see the damage to my tubes

The chances were very slim for us to conceive naturally so Dr A performed tubal surgery to hopefully clear my tubes. This was a C-Section cut and 6 weeks to recuperate

We were then informed to go away and try to conceive naturally. We had a 40% chance that we would be successful, we tried for 9 months and then returned to Ocean Suite.

Then our IVF Journey began

To start with there were lots of forms before we could start our first round of treatment in February 2015

We were excited, nervous and I just felt like Ocean Suite was our HOPE.

February 2015. We had 2 embryos put in, we did our pregnancy test 2 weeks later and it was POSITIVE. Ben and I were so excited.

A couple of weeks later I began to bleed and was informed it was a miscarriage, I then kept bleeding for about 8 weeks, I had a scan and was informed we had an ectopic pregnancy and it was quite large and needed to be removed. I had to have surgery and during this surgery I had to have my tube removed due to the size of the ectopic but he also tied my other tube because I was a high risk of having another ectopic on our next treatment. So I wouldn't ever be able to conceive naturally, which I found hard to deal with, but knew he would always do the best for me and I always trusted him.

2nd Round FET

We had 2 frozen embryos put in, 2 weeks after having them put in we did our test and it was negative. We found this so hard there was no Hope at all

3rd Round FET

We had 2 Frozen Embryos put in and these were our last ones. We got a positive on our test, the best feeling in the world! After a few weeks I started to bleed. We had miscarried again, it was so upsetting.

4th Round

This time we had a Fresh Cycle and we had 2 embryos put in. We stayed hopeful and had our test after 2 weeks, and it was Positive again, but after 3-4 weeks I began to bleed again. I really couldn't believe we was miscarrying again.

Break in treatment to research

We went to London to see a Multiple Miscarriage Specialist. We had tests done and the results all came back fine.

5th Round

We had a Frozen Cycle and had 2 embryos put in. We did our pregnancy test and we got a positive. Three weeks later we had a scan to check, unfortunately, they saw an empty sac, it hadn't grown and was too small. Ben and I just couldn't speak. We felt so sad and just wondered why did this keep happening?

6th Round

I felt something had to change something WILL change and we spoke to DR A and decided we wanted to use clexane and aspirin this time because we had to do something different.

We had our last 2 frozen embryos put in, I started the clexane that day and the aspirin would be on the test day, as long as it was positive. We got a positive result, it was amazing.

We had the scan and they saw a sac, but they were confused by the size of the embryo, it looked smaller than the date of the pregnancy. They couldn't see a heartbeat, they thought it was a blighted ovum.

We went to the early pregnancy unit straight away, we saw the doctor and she told us that she could see the embryo and that we

needed to continue with our medication for a week and then come back for another scan. We went back a week later and had a scan, the embryo was measured and it had stopped growing, we felt so empty and Why Us?

We had to have a D&C, we were so sad knowing our embryo had to be removed and in this traumatic way, our dream had been shattered. We had no embryos left, so it would need to be a fresh cycle on our next go.

7th Cycle

This was a fresh cycle and we used clexane and aspirin again, so we felt positive and knew we had to go in feeling that this could work, we just had to keep believing. We did our test 2 weeks after they were put in, it was my birthday. Ben went into the bathroom like he did with all of our other tests and he came out with it smiling, it said Pregnant! It was such a special moment for us, I just stared at it.

We had our scan booked at 6 weeks instead of the usual 7 weeks because of what had happened to us and how long we had been trying, they knew we were so nervous.

We were at the scan I had to gather myself, Ben helped, he was always amazing. It

went silent like it did the other times, I just felt myself crying and Ben just didn't look, then all of a sudden she said, 'I see a heartbeat'. I can't tell you how amazing it was, it was indescribable, and then she said, 'I see another!' We couldn't believe it, we had 2 heartbeats, we had TWINS. Was she correct, and were we really that lucky? She showed them to us on the screen and we could see them both, I didn't want that moment to end.

The day we had always waited for had come true!

I was pregnant! It was true! We were going to have our family!

We lost many of our miracles along the way. They will always be our miracles, they knew we were supposed to have Joseph and Arabella. If our journey was any different, they wouldn't be here with us today so I will always be thankful to them, only in me for a short time but will be with me forever.

We now have 2 year old twins, a boy and a girl, Joseph and Arabella born on different days in different months, amazing in their own way and our miracles forever.

You can read Kelly's full story on our website.

OUR WEBINAR SERIES; IT'S CREATION AND WHERE WE ARE TODAY

The previous success of our More to Life Webinar Series led us to wonder if the same model could be successfully translated to serve another community: the TTC community. We first discussed this idea in 2018. Our early hopes were to match up expert knowledge with increasing demands for reliable information in line with our above objective charter. We imagined and hoped the same digital technology that was serving our More to Life Community could match up relevant advice and support to those struggling with infertility. We wanted anyone with an internet connection to have the choice to connect to live sessions, no matter where they lived.

By January 2019 we had taken the plunge. Our series began with a session that hoped to ease the worries of new patients when they first visit an assisted conception clinic. Isabel Traynor, the lead nurse for Gynaecology and Assisted Conception for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, talked through the procedures met when facing a new treatment journey. She demystified jargon around the expected tests and possible results. It was quickly evident this session duly delivered in giving both sound practical advice as well as creating positive emotional benefits for the attendees. Instantly, we received enquiries about when the next session would take place.

In the following 18 months we offered two very different sessions by Victoria Smith, a nutritionist. Her first webinar tackled the small changes that can be made to diet and lifestyle to get the body ready to conceive and her second was much more about nutritional therapy for conditions that may cause many fertility struggles. Our own FNUK London



coordinator, Anya Sizer, also took up the mantle of leading a session. Her many years of experience in running support groups came to the fore as she offered comprehensive steps that should be taken to maintain self-care whilst facing infertility.

The live participation rates pointed to a continuation of the series. As an organisation we recognised its value as an emotional support and felt it was prudent to satisfy the appetite for more of the same.

As 2019 progressed the series explored many diverse themes. Due to the wide-ranging reasons and treatments for infertility, we found an endless supply of subjects to cover and don't ever expect to ever run short on topics. Experts talked about donor conception, yoga, the importance of counselling, acupuncture, male infertility, the dreaded menopause and coping with Christmas whilst facing a fertility journey.

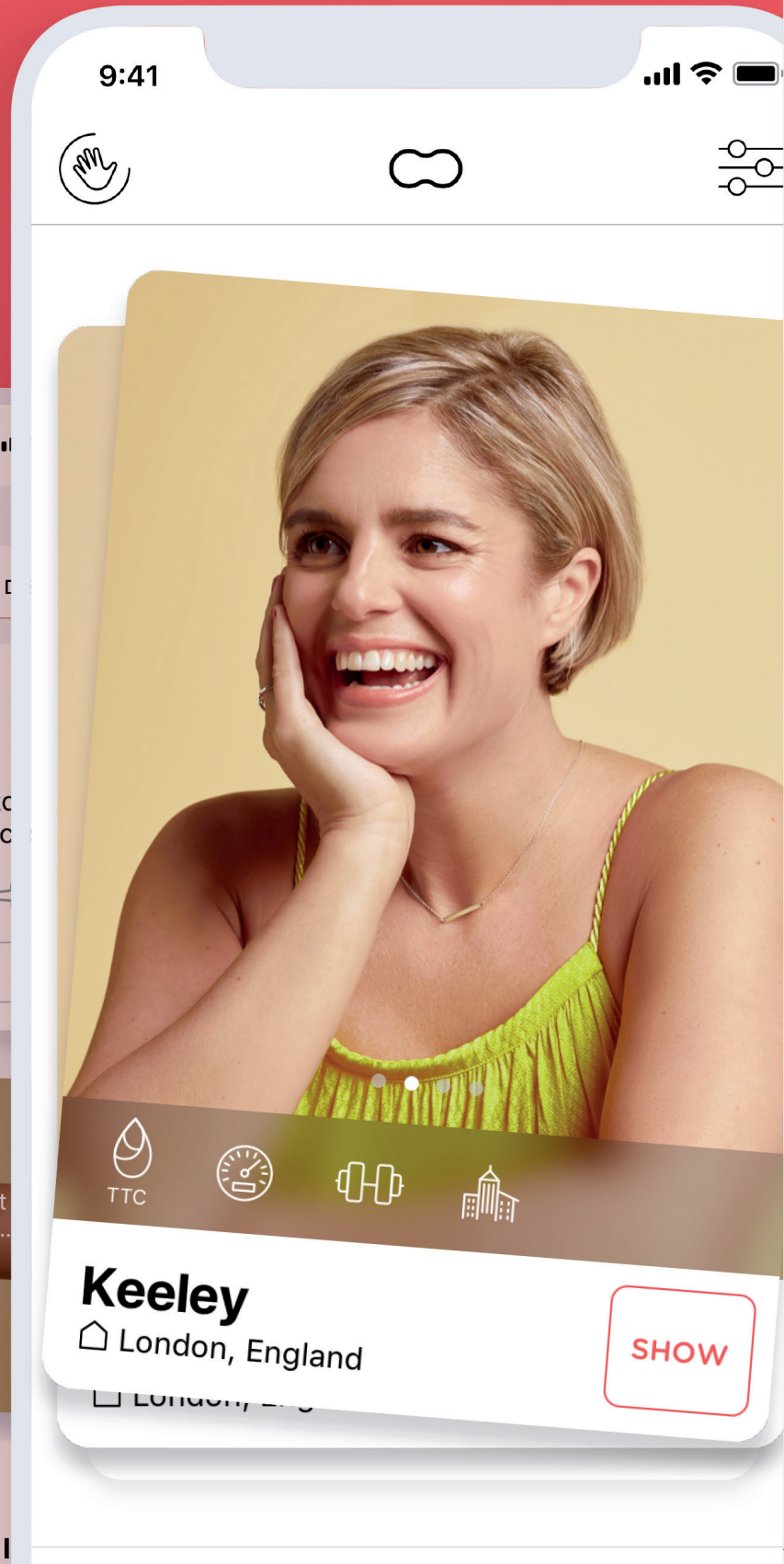
As we moved in 2020, and March threw us into Lockdown, we suddenly felt that now was the perfect time to up the number of webinars on offer, seeing as many people were now in the very difficult and stressful situation of having their treatments paused. We began our 8 weeks of Fertility Yoga, which was a massive hit and got extended into June. We heard from professor Anne Hemingway about the benefits of HSGs, we held a mini-series on Fertility and The Arts and invited the HFEA to talk to us about the safe re-opening of clinics during the time of Covid.

We have plenty more webinars planned, and we're looking forward to hearing from some amazing experts, but if you have any ideas for content or suggestions for speakers, then please do get in touch!



Fertility is a journey

Download Peanut to
meet other women
who get it.



PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF WOMEN IN IVF DURING AND POST COVID-19

By Prof Dr Geeta Nargund
Medical Director CREATE Fertility

Conventional vs Mild stimulation IVF views of Professor Geeta Nargund, a specialist in Mild and Natural IVF. As a charity, we are impartial and share differing views of interest to our readers.

The reopening of UK IVF clinics in May provided relief for women and couples across the UK, who had faced an anxious and frustrating halt to treatment.

This of course does not signal a return to normal, with IVF now taking place in line with essential Covid-19 guidelines, designed to protect staff, patients and the wider public.

However, the suspension must also serve as a wake up call to the IVF sector to ensure that we are consistently

prioritising the safety of women undergoing IVF treatment, and working to reduce the burden of IVF treatment on our NHS as a result of hospitalisation from complications such as Ovarian Hyper Stimulation Syndrome (OHSS). One of the most effective ways to reduce OHSS and related health risks is to use mild stimulation for IVF.

Several high quality, peer reviewed scientific papers have demonstrated that the success rates of Mild stimulation IVF are equivalent to Conventional high stimulation protocols. In addition it acts to reduce the burden of treatment for women and any potential long or short term health complications, which must be treated by the NHS and therefore places

further pressure on their services.

Globally the Coronavirus crisis has turned life upside down, but it has also provided an opportunity for us to examine the status quo. It is vital that we use this time to pursue IVF treatment that is not only best for patients but also socially responsible.

As we all work to make sure that the health and safety of patients is protected during Covid-19, it is time re-think treatment approaches and make sure that protecting patient's health and our NHS remain a priority well beyond the pandemic.



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Your Stories: Fertility Show's MD, Laura Biggs, shares her story

Hello, I'm the MD of the Fertility Show that we proudly run in partnership with The Fertility Network. Our event is due to run in November at London Olympia, when we sincerely hope that lockdown will be a distant memory and treatment plans can once again get started .

I am 49 years old and the proud mother of two children: a 14 year old son and a 1 year old daughter; both of whom I had trouble conceiving. Our son arrived after 4 long years of trying with some help from a diagnosis and treatment for endometriosis (back then little was known about its impact on fertility). By the time our son was 3 years old, I decided that I would love to try for another baby. Two laparoscopies, three rounds

of IVF, one miscarriage and 10 years later, our donor egg baby, Isabella finally arrived, in April last year.

I wanted to share this as I know many of you reading this will be fretting about your treatment plans and the delay that you might be experiencing because of the impact of COVID-19. I know, from bitter experience, the nagging thought that the clock is ticking and the fear and disappointment that comes from not being pregnant or not being able to start your treatment plan, that grows with every month that goes by. I did nearly give up my hope of being a mother again. I never thought it would happen. I was worried about being too old and about using a donor, but to be honest I

had a healthy pregnancy and was well looked after by both my clinic and the wonderful maternity team at Kingston Hospital. I am an older mum, but it doesn't bother me. I feel absolutely blessed to have the second chance, and it's all the sweeter for having to wait so long for her. Isabella's donor was from Spain where my husband and I eventually had our treatment. We chose to go abroad as we both agreed that we wanted the legal anonymity that comes with egg donation in Spain. Everything about the treatment and process in Spain was first class. We will share with Isabella - as soon as she's old enough to understand - how hard we worked to have her and the gift that someone gave to help us have her.

I'm sharing my story because of the importance of the Fertility Show in our personal fertility journey. Listening to seminars about older women and donor eggs and meeting patients who already had children via donors meant that our eyes were opened to possibilities that we had never considered. To be honest, I wish when I was 43 and having one last go at IVF treatment with my own eggs, that someone had pointed out to me the stark statistics of forty-something-old eggs versus those of a younger donor. But I'm a firm believer that everything happens as it's meant to and Isabella came along at the perfect time for us.

For those of your reading this, I hope that I am giving you hope that although time isn't on our side when it comes to fertility, that there are alternative options to consider to help you achieve the family you desire. When I look back to the beginning of our journey over 15 years ago, I wish that the Fertility Show had been around then. It would have helped me understand more about endometriosis and how this condition can have an enormous effect on your ability to conceive naturally. I would have probably considered freezing my eggs and I definitely would not have felt so alone.

Seventeen years ago, I was the only person in my peer group not falling pregnant at the drop of a hat! I've been where many of you are now; when we first got married the inevitable questions and "well-meaning" advice just kept on coming: 'When are you going to have a baby?', "You just need to relax and go on holiday - my friend

did that and fell pregnant straight away!" And then, even worse, when friends and family no longer ask if you're thinking of having a baby or thinking about baby number two as if my days as a potential mother were well past their sell-by-date!

Getting your head round a donor egg took a little while. I remember trying to describe it to my Dad - who is a young at heart 80 year old, putting it like this: "Imagine if you had a bad heart and needed a transplant, you would take one to live longer and feel so happy that you had a second chance and feel eternally grateful to the person who allowed you that chance". Well that's how I feel about my egg donor: the amazing young woman who, for largely altruistic reasons (donors in Spain only receive 700 euros), gave me the gift of motherhood when I honestly thought I wouldn't get a second chance. When Isabella was about 4 months old, my Dad turned to me (now a grandfather for the fourth time) and said, "I don't feel any differently about her from the other three grandchildren. She's gorgeous! It doesn't matter how she came into our family"

I feel passionately about helping others achieve the family that they dream of and it all starts with making the best and most informed choices for each individual fertility journey. The Fertility Show has a renowned seminar programme and this year we are privileged to have Jessica Hepburn, fertility campaigner and author, to direct and curate our content to ensure that it is the best it can be and that it covers a broad and relevant range of fertility needs. Our programme this

year is split into 6 core strands covering common fertility problems and diagnoses, types of treatment, health, wellbeing & lifestyle, modern families (adoption, solo parenthood, LGBT), patient stories (often sharing and hearing others stories inspires or helps us) and how to choose a fertility clinic.

In addition to the Show's seminar programme, we have approximately 100 exhibitors ranging from IVF clinics from both home and abroad, sperm and egg banks, alternative and natural therapies and supplements, legal support, adoption agencies, surrogacy agencies and, of course, impartial support is there in abundance from the fabulous and knowledgeable team from Fertility Network. We also have a community lounge where you can meet with other patients and share stories, meet ambassadors and in general know that you are not alone in your journey. The show really does help you appreciate that there are many of us who need help to find our unique route to parenthood and that it doesn't always come naturally. Our plan is to hold our much-needed event on the 6-8th November at London Olympia, to coincide with National Fertility Awareness Week. Make sure you sign up on our website for our newsletter which will give you the most up to date show information and let you know when tickets are going on sale along with full details of our seminar programme. We look forward to seeing you there and helping you to make more informed choices and decisions for your journey. Take care and keep well.

SUPPLEMENTS

How much is too much?

When you decide to try for a baby, are struggling to conceive or are awaiting treatment such as IVF, we know that taking natural, balanced fertility supplements can help you conceive and deliver a healthy baby.

It is well known that half of all fertility problems are linked to sperm quality. So often we hear about oxidative stress that can cause DNA fragmentation.

Contrary to what we hear, supplements containing strong antioxidants such as Vitamins A, C and E and other strong antioxidants such as Selenium and CoQ10 – can cause the opposite effect – reductive stress leading to sperm DNA decondensation and an inability of sperm to fertilise an egg.

It is because of this that many specialists recommend supplements that support the body to produce Glutathione, the body's own master antioxidant. Glutathione is at the cutting edge of fertility support and stops DNA fragmentation without (unlike strong antioxidants) causing DNA decondensation, helping produce the best sperm for fertilisation and maintenance of an ongoing pregnancy. Glutathione cannot be absorbed by the body; therefore, you need to choose a balanced micro-nutrient supplement that enables your body to produce adequate Glutathione.

Clinical studies have shown that when men and women take this kind of support, the number of spontaneous pregnancies increases, even in couples that were unable to fall pregnant from assisted reproductive technique such as IVF/ICSI.

Women with PCOS who are not ovulating may consider myo-inositol, but do you know that about 40% of women with PCOS cannot absorb myo-inositol effectively? Choosing a myo-inositol product with alpha-lactalbumin; helps to reduce the inflammation associated with PCOS, increases the absorption of myo-inositol and facilitates the release of melatonin – good for egg quality!

For more information about fertility and balanced supplements that will support men, women and your future family, visit www.fertilityfamily.co.uk





Fertility Family is dedicated to providing information and support to help people wanting to build their own family...

You may have been trying to get pregnant for a while, you may need help getting pregnant, you may be going through fertility treatment and want to increase your chances of getting pregnant or you may have only just decided that you want to get pregnant.

Fertility Family provides information and products that can help increase your chances of getting pregnant and delivering a healthy baby.

When you want to conceive, the quality of the sperm and the egg is paramount. It is important to support your metabolism in a balanced way to optimise egg and sperm quality and so increase your chances of becoming pregnant and delivering a healthy baby.

Our fertility supplements provide this balanced support.

Inofolic® Alpha

The PCOS supplement for women for life



Impryl®

The fertility supplement for both men and women

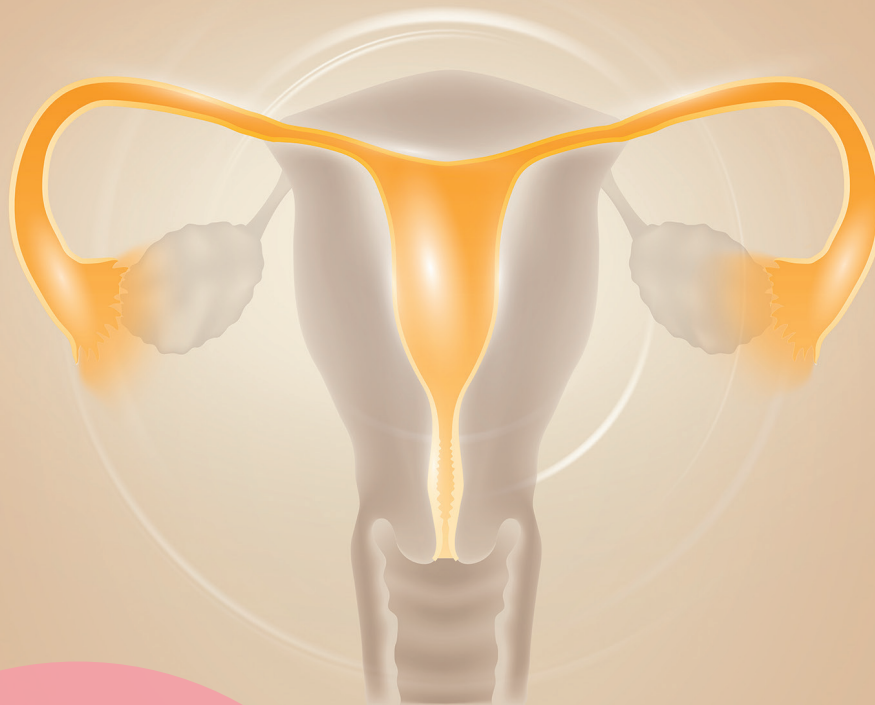


- The unique **Impryl®** formula with proven effectiveness helps your body to develop good quality sperm or eggs.
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WHAT AN HSG TEST IS, WHAT IT DOES, AND WHY THIS CAN BE A TEST FOR EVERYONE

By Professor Anne Hemingway

We're dispelling the myths and explaining the benefits for natural fertility.

A hysterosalpingogram (HSG), is an X-ray to look for abnormalities in the womb, or blockages in the fallopian tubes, which may explain why a woman is unable to get pregnant or is suffering miscarriages. Sometimes we undertake the investigation in women

who have had surgery to their womb or tubes to check all is well before they try to conceive.

A woman will be referred for an HSG by her fertility team. The HSG, together with ultrasound (which looks at the ovaries, the lining and wall of the womb), blood tests (which check how the ovaries are working) and her partner's sperm test, give the fertility team a picture of what is causing subfertility and informs them how best to treat the couple.

The examination is undertaken in the

first half of the woman's menstrual cycle, after she has stopped bleeding. She is asked not to have intercourse from the first day of the period and until after the test to ensure she is not pregnant at the time of the examination.

It is important to remember that, for these couples, the infertility journey can be a stressful time. We should recognise that and treat them with dignity, respect and empathy.

On arrival, the woman will be asked to change into a gown and brought to the X-ray room. After taking a brief history, the procedure is fully explained, and the woman is given time for questions and is asked to give her consent to

proceed.

She then lies on the X-ray table in a similar position to having a smear. A speculum is very gently inserted into the vagina. A very soft tube or catheter is then passed into the canal that leads from the cervix to the womb.

A clear liquid (called 'contrast') is then gently passed into the womb. It contains iodine, which can be seen on X-ray images. Using an X-ray camera the doctor watches on a TV screen as the fluid passes into the womb and the tubes.

Four or five pictures are taken to make a record of what is seen. The X-ray table may be tilted, or the patient asked to roll from side to side to help the tubes to fill. Coughing and laughter are great aids to tubal filling!

Side effects – these are few and should be discussed in detail with the doctor undertaking the procedure. Discomfort – patients' pain thresholds vary.

Some women don't feel a thing, some find it uncomfortable – a bit like period cramps. Only a very few, in our experience, find it very painful. Infection – this is uncommon and most likely to occur in women who have had an infection before. In our practice, all ladies are given a single dose of antibiotics to

minimise this risk.

Reaction to fluid (contrast) – this is very unusual with modern contrast; we check beforehand if women have any significant allergies. Radiation – radiologists work within very strict regulations regarding about the amount of radiation that can be used and there are national guidelines to minimise any risk from radiation.

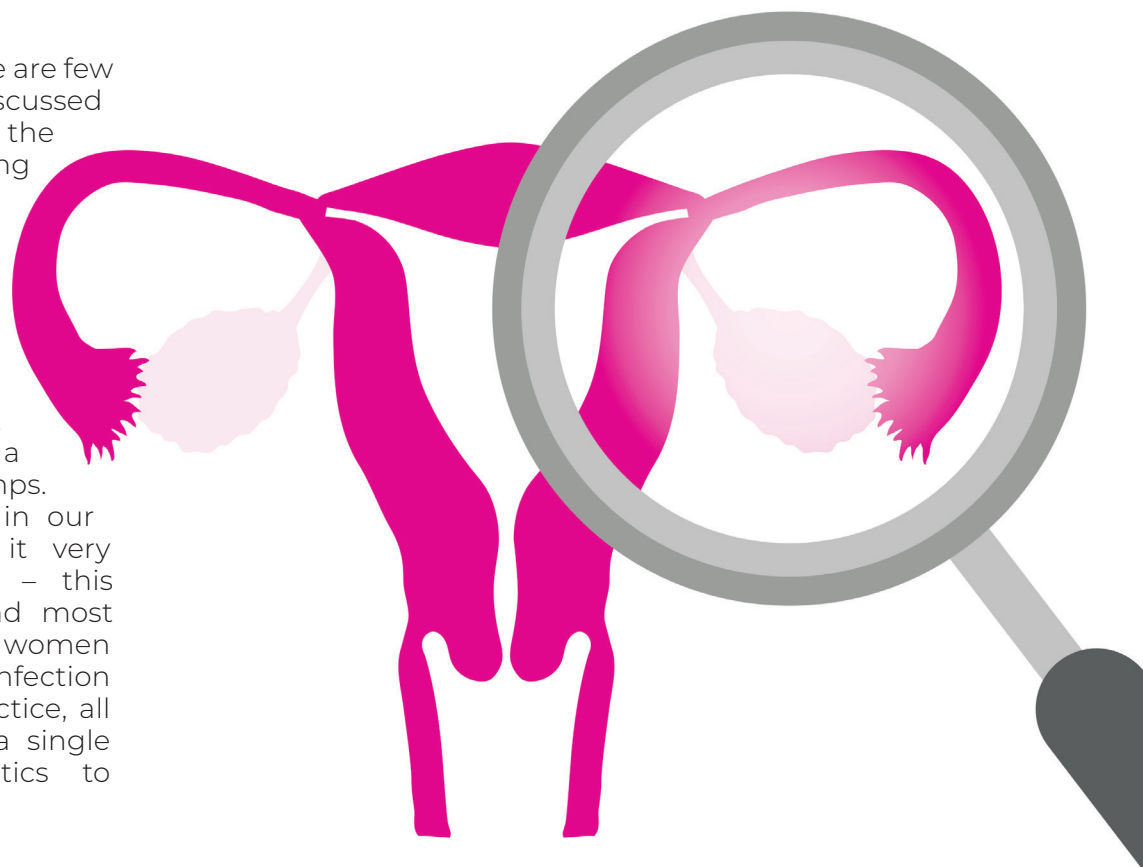
The benefits of an HSG

There are two types of fluid (contrast) we can use for an HSG – one is water soluble and the other is oil soluble. There have been many anecdotal reports of

enhanced natural pregnancy rates after an HSG. In 2017, a detailed study undertaken in the Netherlands proved conclusively that, in women under 38 with unexplained subfertility, an HSG with oil-based contrast resulted in higher ongoing pregnancy and live birth rates than an HSG with water soluble contrast.

So, in couples with unexplained infertility, the HSG is not only diagnostic but may also offer them an increased chance of natural conception.

Written By:
Professor Anne
Hemingway.
Consultant Radiologist





From London to Paris for Fertility Network, thanks Sarah!

A chance conversation can lead to an unexpectedly rewarding and long journey.

One such journey began when Jody Day, of Gateway Women, suggested to Sarah that her new-found passion for cycling could be channelled into raising funds for More to Life.

Sarah took on the challenge, turning her personal sadness into a life affirming experience. Showing tenacity, determination and grit she not only cycled 370 miles from London to Paris but also raised the amazing sum of £1998.18.

Sarah is #LivingProof that adversity can create a steely determination to form new life goals and

achieve them.

Back in March 2019 she first contacted More to Life because Jody Day, the founder of Gateway Women, suggested to her in passing that MTL supports those living with the challenges of childlessness.

After some research Sarah recognised her real personal connection with our work. She liked the sound of our volunteer led Meet Up groups, e-newsletters and webinars, and how they support those with involuntary childlessness to find acceptance in their unwanted status.

Many reasons can create unwanted childlessness for women. Most have to face their personal heartbreak before acceptance can ever be reached. Sarah's affinity to

the work of MTL was born out of her own heart-breaking story in which she identified herself as 'stumbling through childlessness.' It cemented her decision to support our work whilst pursuing her new-found interest in cycling.

At MTL we encourage our community to explore new life pathways as a coping strategy for the inevitable ups and downs that a childless life throws up. So it seemed obvious that by regularly featuring Sarah's progress in our e-newsletters, it would not only support her own acceptance but also inspire others to search for theirs.

By following these extracts from past editions, we can hear Sarah's own words as we chronicled her journey.

April 2019:

"Three years ago after a year of tests and scans it was suggested I have investigative surgery to seek answers to my unexplained infertility. This revealed that I had suffered a significant internal infection post emergency appendix surgery, when aged 32, causing irreparable damage to my reproductive organs. I'd had no idea.

It was devastating news which compounded my sadness at finding myself childless, in my forties and without any hope of having my own biological child. I guess we all have an idea of how our lives will look, and for me, motherhood was a significant part of it.

In between those many moments of confusion, despair and anxiety around my future, I began to realise I actually do have an enormous capacity to act, adapt and maybe get excited about many more life paths that will bring their own challenges and joys.

When I felt calm and hopeful, I knew there would eventually be 'More to Life,' with a plan B, C or even a D! So, to boost my mood, creativity and confidence in life I decided to set myself a significant fitness goal.

I bought a road bike and started pedalling. I felt energised, determined and not too afraid of those 370 lumpy cycling miles between London and Paris.

I am cycling specifically to raise money for MTL which supports many facing the challenges of childlessness,

to accept their reality, make meaning of their experience and refocus their lives on other fulfilling goals."

At MTL we know that the camaraderie and support of others can help us stay on track. In Sarah's next update read about the positive effect of sharing her journey with others.

June 2019:

"The months are flying by now and I'm counting down to my London to Paris cycle on the 18th September – in 15 weeks! Eek! I've braved clip in pedals and shoes for 3 weeks now, and so far only fallen off once - from stationary! Simply forgot to unclip – no injuries, just bruised pride!

I've joined a ladies' cycling club 'Bell Velo', whose warmth and encouragement has given me a significant boost, both on and off the very busy A3.

Honestly, the training is hard. It's taking a huge amount of motivation, effort, and commitment. But committed I am! Because the pay offs are huge. My mood has shifted into a positive gear, my humour has returned, and I find myself planning new adventures as I ride.

Life is so what we choose to make of it. My plan A might have been taken away but no doubt my plan B or C or D will bring many more challenges and joys!

My amazing family and friends have donated just over £1100 between them, but I need to raise another £500 or I cannot qualify to

ride after 7 months of training. So please, if you can, donate to this crucial charity that supports many through the very painful experience of childlessness. and give me a reason to keep hitting the tarmac. I am so grateful for whatever you can give.

August 2019:

'The very warm June was a tough training month...I headed out with the Bella Velo ladies' cycling club for a 55 mile ride on the hottest Saturday of the year, 33 degrees in London and Surrey.

The support, warmth, and humour of the group made the time fly! And just two weeks ago I completed a milestone solo ride: 67 miles!

Boy did I suffer from a sore sitting bone and achy neck for the following few days.. but felt so happy about my achievement. Our route for day one London to Paris is 95 miles, and takes me from Crystal Palace to Dover. It's the longest and hardest day, so these longer training rides are getting me one psychological step closer to Paris – I can do this!!!

And just last weekend I completed the Prudential Ride 'London Surrey' as part of my training. It was so exhilarating cycling with 1000's of others, on closed London and Surrey roads.

Bonjour!

We had the perfect weather and I managed to avoid any technical bike issues or accidents. Huge thank you to anyone who has donated – I am now only £170 from my fund-raising target of £1600.

Every pound donated helps motivate to keep pedalling and reminds me I can live my Plan B alongside the grief of childlessness, and of course raise some money for More to Life at Fertility Network UK.

As the race approached, we knew Sarah would be busy but she still agreed to submit a photo and message as soon as possible on achieving her goal.

September 2019:

Our Super Sarah has done it! Last weekend she completed the cycle from London to Paris. Although she may be achey and sore, this is an incredible achievement by one of our amazing volunteers. Thank you Sarah!

October 2019:

Our inspiring volunteer Sarah reached her destination of Paris, raising an amazing £1998.18.

Thank you Sarah! We are grateful for your tenacity, determination and for sharing your journey. Cycling from London to Paris moved Sarah beyond the devastation of childlessness.

Every turn of the pedal helped her accept that her personal story will not include children but can still include other rewarding experiences. Thank you for all donations and especially to Sarah!

More to Life support can be accessed at:

<https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/life-without-children/>

If you would like to use your personal experience to undertake a positive fundraising challenge visit:

<https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/get-involved/fundraising/>

Bonjour!



News from Wales

Having recently been awarded a Community Fund Grant, it is an exciting time for us in Wales as we expand our service to reach more of those affected by a fertility issue.

Wales Coordinator, Alice Matthews, said “We are delighted to have been awarded this funding and want to again thank players of the National Lottery. Offering Wales specific information and guidance is vital in a nation where there are only two tertiary clinics providing NHS fertility treatment and long journeys and limited access to counselling can result in increased feelings of anxiety and isolation. This funding will allow FNUK to expand our service across the country, providing pathway and funding information, impartial advice, and emotional support to anyone who needs it. We can now also begin working with employers

and educational establishments to raise public awareness and encourage the vital workplace changes that are needed for anyone who is, or has been, affected by this disease”. Our Education Development Office, Michèle, will be working with young adults to increase awareness of their future fertility; informing those in universities, colleges and community settings about how certain factors may impact their ability to conceive in the future.



‘Hi, I’m Emma and in my role as Project Worker for South Wales, my aim is to help others and raise awareness of fertility issues. I am dedicated in supporting those who are impacted by fertility issues because I understand the huge emotional impact that it can have on someone, having been on my own fertility journey’.





'Hi, my name is Liz and I have previously worked as a Fertility Secretary within the NHS for 3 years. I am very enthusiastic about helping people that are struggling with this issue and very excited to start my new role as Project Worker for Mid and North Wales'.



'Hi, I'm Michèle, the new Education Development Officer for Wales, living in Ceredigion. I have over 25 years' teaching experience in a wide range of contexts and am really excited about my new challenge to provide information to young people to enable them to safeguard their fertility and reproductive health'.

Young people will have better access to the facts around age, egg quality and contributing health conditions such as endometriosis, hormone imbalances and Varicocoeles, better enabling them to make informed decisions about their own fertility.

Working with trainee GPs, student nurses and midwives will allow us to increase knowledge and understanding amongst our future front-line health professionals. Knowledge not only on the different conditions affecting fertility and their treatments, but also about the significant emotional impact of infertility and how important the correct referral pathways and signposting are in lessening the

impact on mental health.

Over the next couple of years, we will work to increase understanding of what fertility treatment is really like for people so that better support can be offered within the workplace. We will also be able to offer more focused support to those facing additional barriers when accessing investigations, treatment and emotional support, including men, those from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, LGBTQ+ people and those affected by cancer.

For more information about any developments in Wales contact alice@fertilitynetworkuk.org

News from Northern Ireland

Life as we knew it before Covid19 has changed so much, but as we adjust to connecting in a digital world, we have discovered that the possibilities are endless.

Our new Closed Facebook group 'Fertility Network NI' is growing fast and providing a private supportive community. With the help of our wonderful volunteers, there is always a big welcome for you. It is helping to reduce isolation and anxiety and providing much comfort.

Meet-ups for our Fertility Network, More to Life and Acebabes support groups are postponed for now, but our new informal 'Fertility Chat Night-In' Zoom chats help to meet others on a similar journey. A Nutritionist and Counsellor have already joined the Zoom chats as Guests and we have others lined up to join our calls into the summer.

The fabulous UK wide Yoga webinar series has been very popular and we are looking at different series here in NI to follow later in the summer, including Mindfulness and Nutrition. With funding from the Tampon Tax, we will be running a Yoga course, a Qi Gong course and two CBT Lifeskills courses. If we are not able to meet up in person, we will also run these online.



Our recent short survey in NI, shows that almost 80% of respondents say that the emotional challenges they faced before the pandemic have worsened and over 90% said they feel anxious.

Big challenges you highlighted included feeling anxious, feeling down, trouble relaxing and feeling upset when you think about past fertility experiences. You said that our new Closed Facebook group and our one-to-one personal support, have been the most beneficial supports with webinars and Zoom chats next.

Thank you to all who took part and for your lovely comments about how we have helped you.

Rachel and I have been busier than ever speaking to more of you and helping to keep you updated on clinic re-openings, but more importantly just being there for you.

So, if you need a helping hand, just get in touch. Remember #YouAreNotAlone.

Hilary@fertilitynetworkuk.org

rachel@fertilitynetworkuk.org

News from Scotland

The Scottish Team have been working hard to support patients through what has been and still is a challenging and distressing time. The team were able to quickly adapt our services to support our patients.

We moved to Zoom support groups and our 1-2-1 services which have increased tenfold but are working extremely well.

Now more than ever patients need our support and we have been able to deliver on this and meet the needs of anyone needing our help. Scotland successfully trialed Fertility Yoga during 2019 and decided to start running these during lockdown digitally to help people with their wellbeing, this has proved a great success. Hopefully we are all heading into a much brighter future ahead.

Fertility Network Scotland has been continuing to work in partnership with a number of Scottish organisations to raise awareness of the work we do.

We have been actively supporting Community Links Practitioners who work in GP surgeries across Scotland and this important network are now signposting patients in need of emotional support during their fertility journey.

We have delivered workshops to many organisations including Versus Arthritis many of whom are suffering with childlessness due to the medicines needed to keep their arthritis under control. We have also been actively involved with employers including RBS supporting them during Babyloss week.

The Scottish Coordinator worked closely with ACAS to support and enhance the employment protection for anyone going through IVF treatment. <https://www.acas.org.uk/your-maternity-leave-pay-and-other-rights/having-ivf-treatment>

An integral part of the work in Scotland is educating young people on how to protect their future fertility. Prior to lockdown the team attended university fresher events across Scotland engaging with thousands of students educating on lifestyle choices which could affect their future fertility.

We would like to thank the Scottish Government for their continued support of our services.



News from England

Work has been hugely varied as regional co-ordinator for the Fertility Network and as always it is a huge privilege to represent the patients and the charity.

Much of my time has been involved with speaking to various organisations about how best to support staff when facing fertility issues, and then delivering our Fertility in The Workplace sessions.

Organisations such as Sony Music, Ernst and Young, LinkedIn and Walsall college have all received training and the feedback has been really encouraging.

It has been so good to hear of many places starting to recognise the need to best support employees in this area and turning to us as the national charity to help facilitate this.

In February we joined forces with Peanut TTC app who produced a powerful and moving film around Mother's Day and social isolation. My role was to support the patients as they were filmed talking about their journeys and I believe the end product was testimony to the resilience and determination of the TTC Community.



Another area I have been working on is supporting patients as they move from treatment into adoption. This is personally an important issue for me as we as a couple have been through both issues and I feel that the move from one chapter to another is still misunderstood and under resourced.

As such I delivered a Webinar with Adoption UK and have recorded one for the British Fertility Society, looking at how patients can best support and equip themselves as they embark on this new venture. It is an area we are keen to help with as a charity and would love to know how best to support our patients in the future.

Finally, the media work has been very busy with the closure and then gradual reopening of the clinics due to Covid-19. Media appearances included BBC, Channel 5, and Woman's hour and again it was a privilege to represent and amplify the patient voice as this difficult time.



Coping with Other People's Pregnancy Announcements

When you're trying to conceive and it's taking longer than you expected, suddenly the world can seem like it's full of bumps, babies and other people's pregnancy announcements. Dealing with other people's pregnancy announcements is hard enough, but it can be particularly painful when it's someone close to you, someone you love, or someone you really want to be happy for.

Remember that it's possible to feel more than one emotion at once

It's completely normal to have more than one emotional reaction to a pregnancy announcement. Don't feel bad for these emotions, they're natural.

Take care of your own emotions first

If you can, allow yourself to initially feel sad, angry and jealous, and then give yourself time to process these emotions. If you accept how you're feeling, you'll probably notice that these emotions fade much quicker, and you can begin to feel happy for the other person.

Talk to the other person about how you're feeling

If you can, finding a way to explain your mixed emotions will also help you process them. Saying, 'I'm so happy for you, I wouldn't want you to have to experience what I'm going through, but I'm still sad for me', can open a two-way

understanding of the situation. Approach this carefully (or not at all) if you think the other person will be upset.

Build a support network of others who understand

Joining social media support groups like our Facebook groups, connecting to others online and perhaps having one friend who you know you can turn to, will make these experiences 100% easier to manage.

Talk to Fertility Network

We're here for you. Head to our website where you will find all the details of our support resources (contact numbers/support groups) and our regional staff contact information. #YouAreNotAlone





ACUPUNCTURE AND FERTILITY

A great support for men too!

For many years Acupuncture has been a popular therapy choice for couples going through fertility treatment. There is a great deal of evidence supporting the effects acupuncture has on stress hormones and blood flow however it's more common for women to take up treatment than men which is a shame given the wider benefits of acupuncture.

It's becoming more apparent how much of an impact infertility is having upon men who can end up carrying a huge burden throughout fertility treatment with little or no support for what they're experiencing. Poor fertility results can cause men to end up feeling isolated and depressed. Yet despite such strong feelings there appears to be nowhere for them to go; nowhere for them to talk openly, express their emotions and importantly get practical advice on what they can do for themselves and their partner.

Acupuncture is a fantastic support to couples trying to conceive and there is no doubt that it helps with reducing stress levels however the wider benefits aren't always immediately obvious and considered.

An acupuncturist will always look at the whole picture to get a full understanding of the issues men and women are facing. This will include looking at all aspects of health including stress and work/life balance. Regular ongoing sessions throughout a fertility journey allow for a huge amount of support emotionally and physically. Having someone you can trust and share your emotional ups and downs with is a huge help in managing the rollercoaster of TTC. Acupuncture offers an opportunity to take the stress out of trying to conceive whilst also providing positive support in all areas of your health and can be a great benefit for men struggling with their fertility journey.

Where to find an acupuncturist – Visit the British Acupuncture Council website www.acupuncture.org.uk or contact them on 020 8735 0400.

LET'S FORGET THE AUNTYJIS AND CULTURAL PRESSURES AND LOOK AFTER OURSELVES

Written by Pooja Bhachu, Auntyjis, Bangles and Babies Blog

'Beta (child), you have been married for one year now and still no baby - is something wrong? You should hurry up or people will start to talk!' As British Asian women we've all heard these comments from countless auntyjis before. Whilst politely delivered, they epitomise a culture which is magnificent yet deeply judgmental and still not open about many issues, including infertility.

Having fertility issues is utterly overwhelming, all-consuming and is often something many of us, regrettably, deal with in secret. There's a lot of shame and embarrassment, disbelief and confusion. This is even more so in the British Asian community because of immense cultural pressures to have children. There is a lack of awareness, shame and ignorance

associated with fertility issues, leading those who struggle to conceive being outcast and ignored.

That's exactly what happened to me and this experience has made me hugely passionate about breaking the taboo and stigma surrounding infertility.

When my husband and I decided to start a family, we could never imagine we would have trouble conceiving. We were both young, fit and healthy and I never had any issues with my monthly cycle. So not being able to conceive caught us completely by surprise.

With every month that passed the whole experience became more stressful. With every negative pregnancy test, my heart would break, our sense of failure increase and hopes of ever becoming parents slowly fade away.

Like many couples, we began to Google ways to increase our chances, including through ovulation kits and changes to our diets. Still nothing. After three years of trying to conceive and countless visits to the GP, I found a gynecologist who wasn't guessing what the issue was. After two surgeries I finally got the answers I was looking for, an issue with one of my



fallopian tubes, and not endometriosis, stress or irregular ovulation as had been assumed by other doctors. Hearing this was incredibly difficult; I felt like a failure - how could I not do the one thing that is so natural - bear a child!

In the midst of all of this, our siblings announced their 'happy' news. The impending babies were being talked about endlessly without any sensitivity for our situation.

The Asian auntyjis were in their element too, remarking 'you need to hurry up, or people will start to talk'. Yet no one asked how we were doing. We were left feeling lonely and belittled. And all this, just as I was about to start my first IVF cycle.

So that insensitive comments and the cultural pressure wouldn't disrupt our treatment, we took the decision to stay away from all the aunties, family or friends who were insensitive or ignorant. It was difficult but so important.

After the rollercoaster of multiple appointments, blood tests and weeks of daily injections, the day of the IVF finally arrived. However, it wasn't all good news! Because our embryos were of a high quality, to give us the best chance possible, the embryologist advised us to freeze them and for me to have another procedure - I was left shattered. I cried the whole day! Maybe we should just give up completely!

Two months later, after a much-needed holiday and another cycle of injections, we finally had the embryo transfer. I will never forget the anxiety and trepidation we felt on our way to the clinic that day. When the embryologist took us into the theatre and said 'Your embryo has thawed 100%'; I broke down in tears in the disbelief that we had even gotten this far!

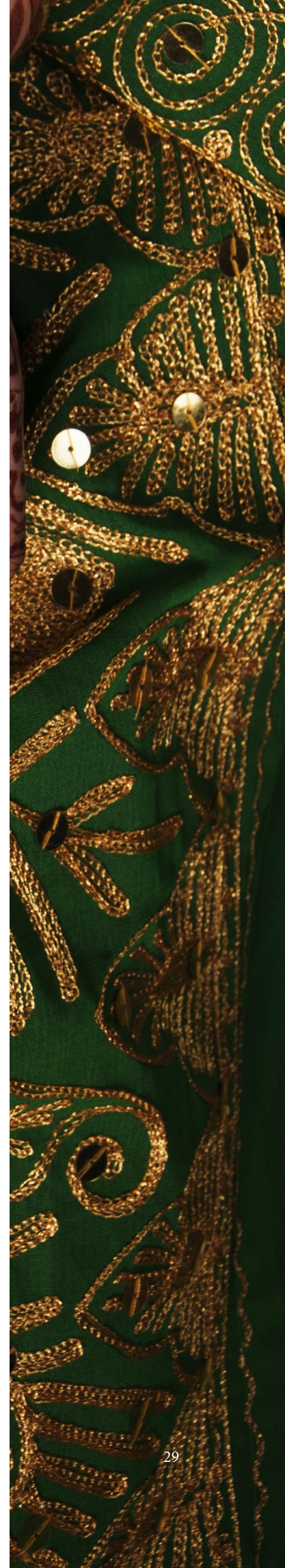
My embryo implanted and I was finally able to hold a positive pregnancy test in my hands after 3 years of negative tests. Nine months later, we welcomed a beautiful baby girl into our family. We planned to do another frozen cycle with our remaining frozen embryo, however, 15 months later, we were unexpectedly blessed with a natural pregnancy and I gave birth to non-identical twins last summer.

On some days I still struggle with the deep scars infertility has left behind, and three years later I'm still learning to process what happened and find a peace and acceptance in our situation.

About me:

I'm Pooja Bhachu; an IVF survivor and infertility advocate. To read more about surviving IVF whilst dealing with the auntyjis, bangles and traditions that make up the British Asian culture, read my blog

<https://auntyjisbanglesandfertility.com>





RAISING AWARENESS FOR MALE FERTILITY ISSUES THROUGH MOTORSPORT

By Jess Shanahan

We all have unique ways of coping with the difficult situations life throws at us but Toby Trice has managed to take something that helped him through a tough time and turn it into a beacon of hope for others.

During his own fertility journey, Toby took to the karting track to clear his head and find some calm in the stressful situation he and his partner Katie were going through. He soon realised that motorsport presented an opportunity to do much more than help him through his own struggles.

Using his platform as a racing driver, Toby is working with Fertility Network UK to raise awareness for fertility issues.

He says: "I'm raising awareness for male infertility, in particular, to make it a topic that's more widely spoken about. I have, in the past, felt so isolated because I wasn't speaking about it, and also those around me found it equally difficult to approach me on the topic. But in fact, talking about it really helps and you feel less isolated from society once you open up the conversation."

Toby understands the more successful he becomes as a racing driver, the more good work he can do in helping others during their fertility journeys. Whether that's welcoming these conversations around the car during a race weekend, or hosting special support groups, motorsport provides a wonderful platform to show people who are going through something similar that they're not alone.

"Becoming an ambassador for Fertility Network UK has been amazing," Toby says. "I am keen to continue to help raise money for the charity so it can continue its incredible work for those couples affected by fertility issues."

As well as being an ambassador for Fertility

Network UK, Toby is going above and beyond to provide support to men who have been affected. Together with the charity,

Toby has recently set up the first male-only online support group, with incredible success.

Toby says: "I am so proud to have set this up with Ian Stones. Right off the bat, we have seen how much need there is for something like this. With amazing feedback, we are now running this support group on a monthly basis."

Toby's goal in motorsport was always to use his platform as a way of helping couples with their fertility journey. He's supporting couples across the country and encouraging more people to talk about what might be a difficult topic for them.

"I want to show that we are not alone and, together in our community, we can support each other without feeling ashamed or embarrassed," Toby adds.

Motorsport is a fantastic platform to spread awareness for these issues and bring people together in a place where they can openly talk about their journeys.

Toby and his team are yet to announce their plans for the 2021 season but are working hard to secure new partnerships that will see them in a very exciting position for the coming year.

If you'd like to find out more about Toby's motorsport career, or would like to support the work he's doing to raise awareness for fertility issues, take a look at tobytriceracing.com.



THE PATIENT PLEDGE

Our mission to ensure everyone
receives exceptional support



When someone starts fertility treatment, they may feel apprehensive, worried, scared and even more alone. It is crucial that clinics ensure the correct emotional support network is in place for their patients. This is also recognised within the 2018/2019 HFEA strategic aims of 'improving the emotional experience of care before, during and after treatment or donation.'

If your clinic is one of our Patient Pledge clinics, then this is their way of demonstrating their commitment to you and showing how they are working collaboratively with the Fertility Network team to support you.

Clinics that are part of The Patient Pledge (TPP) are offered training for all staff on the emotional and psychological impact patients can experience through their

fertility journey, training and help in setting up support groups is provided, the clinic receives a TPP certificate and our literature to display ensuring patients are aware of the charity and the free impartial services we offer including a supportline which is manned 3 days per week by a retired Fertility Nurse, peer support, advice, webinar programme and events to anyone facing fertility issues.

During the uncertain times of the Covid-19 pandemic Fertility Network have been supporting thousands of patients; by telephone, by webinars and by Zoom. Our aim is to ensure every patient has the emotional support

they need, to reduce the stress, anxiety and isolation experienced by so many.

We recognise that building and maintaining a good relationship with clinics is vital especially when we strive to achieve the same goal; supporting patients through their fertility journey.

If your clinic would like to be part of The Patient Pledge initiative please contact: sharonm@fertilitynetworkscotland.org or telephone: 07411 752688

OUR PATIENT PLEDGE CLINICS

AGORA Brighton and Hove
www.agoraclinic.co.uk

APRICITY London
www.apricity.life

BRISTOL CENTRE FOR
REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE Bristol
www.fertilitybristol.com

CLINICAL DIAGNOSTIC
SERVICES LONDON LTD London
www.clinicaldiagnostics.co.uk

CHELSEA AND WESTMINSTER London
www.chelwest.nhs.uk/private-care/fertility-treatment

CREATE Manchester, Birmingham,
London, Bristol, Oxford and Hertfordshire
www.createfertility.co.uk

THE CENTRE FOR REPRODUCTIVE
& GENETIC HEALTH (CRGH) London
www.crgh.co.uk

CENTRE FOR REPRODUCTIVE
AND GYNAECOLOGY WALES
AND WEST (CRGW) Wales
www.crgw.co.uk

THE EVEWELL London
www.evewell.com

GENNET CITY London
www.city-fertility.com

GCRM Fertility Glasgow
www.gcrm.co.uk

HULL IVF Hull
www.hullivf.org.uk

LONDON IVF AND GENETICS CENTRE London
www.londonivfandgenetics.co.uk

LEICESTER FERTILITY CENTRE Leicester
www.leicesterfertilitycentre.org.uk

NEWCASTLE CENTRE FOR LIFE Newcastle
www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk/services/fertility-centre

NHS ORCHARD CLINIC Craigavon
www.southerntrust.hscni.net/our-hospitals/craigavon-area-hospital

BELFAST HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE
TRUST REGIONAL FERTILITY CENTRE Belfast
www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/services/rfc

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH GROUP Cheshire
www.reproductivehealthgroup.co.uk

THE SHROPSHIRE AND MID WALES
FERTILITY CENTRE Shrewsbury
www.shropshireivf.nhs.uk

EU CLINICS EMBRYOCLINIC Greece
www.embryoclinic.eu

INSTITUTE LIFE MITERA Greece
www.mitera.gr/en/department-page/assisted-reproduction-unit

IVF SPAIN Spain
www.ivf-spain.com

IVF TURKEY Turkey
www.ivfturkey.com

JESSOP FERTILITY Sheffield
www.jessopfertility.org.uk

BARTS HEALTH FERTILITY London
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/fertility

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