

BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES**HEAL** cover story - Dr. Sharad - NST-20.10.15

The rise of older celebrity mothers may have fuelled the perception that a woman can start her family much later, but the delay could end in heartbreak, writes

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CELEBRITIES make motherhood seem so easy and effortless. When we see famous women like Nicole Kidman, Mariah Carey and Halle Berry having children well into their 40s, it often gives the impression that getting pregnant is a breeze at any stage in one's life.

It almost makes one believe that motherhood can be temporarily shelved or shifted but still easily attainable years later, perhaps with the use of assisted reproductive methods such as IVF, a route taken by many celebrity mums.

However, there is only so much that science can do to challenge nature. The age of the woman plays a crucial role in IVF success rates, says Dr Sharad Ratna, consultant gynaecologist and fertility specialist at Obgyn Centre in Subang Jaya, Selangor.

Research clearly indicates that IVF success rates decrease significantly as a woman ages. It is much more difficult to achieve an IVF pregnancy in a woman aged 40 or above as compared to a younger woman.

As a result, women who plan to put off having children should realise that as they age, their chances of pregnancy even with IVF, gets lower and lower.

Fertility experts generally recommend that women have their families in place by the time they turn 30, but an increasing number of young professional women these days only start trying for a child after 30. Many choose to delay childbearing in their 20s for various reasons, including career advancement as well as social, financial and personal reasons, explains Dr Sharad.

For many of these women, when they are finally ready to welcome a baby, age acts against them and fertility problems lead to difficulties in conceiving. "The message that fertility drops after 30 hasn't really sunk in among women and also, the fact that the success rate of fertility treatment decreases after 30."

BETTER APPROACH

Dr Sharad says however, IVF procedures have evolved and become more sophisticated to cope with the increasing demand for the treatment. "The protocols that we use today are more effective and safer, and we also have better drugs, newer drugs, more sophisticated laboratories and better quality control in these labs."

PGS or Pre-Implantation Genetic Screening, which has been available for 10 years, has also helped improve IVF success rates. PGS enables the detection of chromosomal and

inherited abnormalities in an embryo, which can lead to a failed pregnancy or miscarriages.

Using the technique, doctors can choose to transfer only the healthiest embryos into a woman's womb, improving her chances of pregnancy.

IVF cycles using frozen embryos also seem to result in better success rates than those utilising fresh embryos. During fertility treatment, there may be excess embryos produced and these are usually kept frozen. These frozen embryos can be used later in another IVF cycle.

Dr Sharad says the increased success rate with frozen embryos could be due to the fact that doctors follow or use a woman's natural hormone cycle when transferring the embryos to her womb. There is also less stress on a woman's body with a frozen embryo cycle as it usually takes place sometime after a



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"stimulated cycle", where a woman is given daily hormonal injections to stimulate her ovaries to produce eggs.

These drugs can affect the whole reproductive tract and one of the things which can be affected is the lining of the womb. However, giving a woman time to recover from this process before

doing an embryo transfer does seem to make a difference.

"Essentially, waiting for some time and allowing things to settle down physically and psychologically in a

FERTILITY AFTER 30