

I went through IVF.

Thirty-four-year old **Debora** and her husband tried for a baby for a year, before eventually giving IVF a go. Trying to get pregnant is a stressful and emotional journey and Debora and her husband have had further obstacles to overcome.

My husband and I tried to conceive naturally for one year after we got married, although we never avoided it or waited for the right moment to have a child (I don't believe this moment exists). We underwent all the investigations until there was no more to be done and IVF was suggested because they couldn't find any major problem.

The whole process was stressful. It was as if we were twirling in a hurricane. There's no information out there, people are ashamed and do not talk about it, it's so hard to get support and at the end it's nothing more than a bet. The doctors and researchers will do their best but then we have the nature factor and herein lies the fear. It happens mainly when they transfer the embryo and for 10 endless days nothing happens. It's such an agony because when you go back for the blood test it will be a big YES or NO.

Also you have the financial side of this story. We spent every penny we'd saved over the past eight years. Other dreams and objectives are put aside. It was really tough and can be even after the treatment, even when it works, as in our case. You welcome your baby but then you see no money in the savings account, and a loan to be paid. It took us seven months to buy a crib

A Helping Hand

PROFESSOR MARY WINGFIELD, CONSULTANT GYNAECOLOGIST AT THE NATIONAL MATERNITY HOSPITAL HOLLES STREET AND CLINICAL DIRECTOR AT THE MERRION FERTILITY CLINIC, OFFERS HER EXPERTISE ON IVF.

IS CONSIDERING IVF THE NEXT STEP FOR COUPLES STRUGGLING TO HAVE CHILDREN?

IVF isn't perfect but it has been the greatest development in fertility treatment over the last 40 years. It is really important that any possible fertility factors are investigated, however up to 50 per cent of people with fertility problems will ultimately need IVF.

DOES IVF SUIT EVERYONE?

In my experience some couples find the treatment easy and others find it more difficult. Some of the stress is due to the treatment itself (injections, scans, intimate examinations) but a lot is related to the stress of infertility. A huge problem is the cost, especially in Ireland where we have no public funding – but I am hopeful that that is going to change soon.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS AROUND IVF?

A very common one is that IVF should only be recommended after people have tried lots of other treatments. Unfortunately, for many people, there are very few treatment options that are likely to help. Another is that IVF doesn't need to be done until the woman is in her late 30s or 40s. Sadly, the success rate is very dependent on the age of the woman. We would do IVF treatment up to the age of 41 or 42, but after that we would recommend IVF using donor eggs because the success rate once a woman reaches 42 is really low: less than a five per cent chance of having a baby.

CAN LIFESTYLE CHANGES BOOST THE CHANCES OF GETTING PREGNANT?

A generally healthy lifestyle helps but it is also important for couples not to get too stressed about being 'perfect'. Definitely smoking is a no-no, alcohol should be reduced to a minimum and drugs such as cannabis and cocaine are disastrous. Being overweight definitely affects fertility and also increases the risk of miscarriage. A Mediterranean diet has been shown to improve fertility.

*For more see Merrionfertility.ie and Professor Wingfield's book *The Fertility Handbook* (Gill).*

for our daughter and for the first six months we used a wrap as we also didn't have money for a pram. This is quite sad because at the end, when you finally have your little one, you want to give comfort and offer your best after having waited for so long.

A week after my daughter was born I developed a condition in both wrists called De Quervain's. It's an inflammation of the tendon and the pain is excruciating. I couldn't hold her – I almost let her fall for few times – or breastfeed properly. This condition triggered postpartum depression (PPD) as I had waited so long, undergone the IVF and at the end I couldn't hold her without pain. It took two months until I found a doctor who immediately knew the condition but then it was too late and I had to have surgery. That was another tough time because the recovery is also painful.

Our now one-year-old daughter is perfect, healthy and beautiful. The whole family is very happy for us and we really feel that she came to bring us

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new direction to our lives. I think that without her I would have stayed in the same job, earning the minimum wage, with no perspective for life and changes. Things are not easy but when I wake up in the morning and I see her smile, I want to fight for a brighter future.

My husband and I got really close during this process and he was always by my side. Now that we have our daughter I can't say how many nights we spent awake, taking care of her and trying to believe that it was all real. ■