

Welcome to the August 2012 edition of the AccessAustralia eNews.

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... also upcoming events and recent news articles of interest to those who have difficulties conceiving.



1. Our thanks for your donation!

We would like to thank the family and friends of Olivia Kair for their generosity. We have received a generous donation of \$385 towards the work of Access.

Megan conceived her daughter Olivia with the help of Dr Kee Ong from Monash IVF on the Gold Coast. They had been trying for 2 years and had multiple miscarriages before they turned to the team at Monash IVF and had success.

For Olivia's Christening Megan asked family and friends for cash donations instead of gifts so that she could give to Access to help others. A wonderful gesture for which we are grateful.

If you would like to make a donation to ACCESS – which is tax deductible – just contact Emma in our office to make a donation. You can email her at emmaelmer@access.org.au or leave a message for her on 1800 888 896 and she will return your call.



2. Single women forget Mr Right to embrace motherhood alone

SINGLE women are flocking to IVF centres to have babies solo as it becomes more socially acceptable for women to forego the wait for a perfect partner.

Data from two of Melbourne's biggest fertility clinics shows that since the January 2010 introduction of legislation giving single women access to IVF treatment, more of them are taking up the option.

For the full story, please read: <http://www.news.com.au/national/single-women-forget-mr-right-to-embrace-motherhood-alone/story-fndo4cq1-1226438034348>

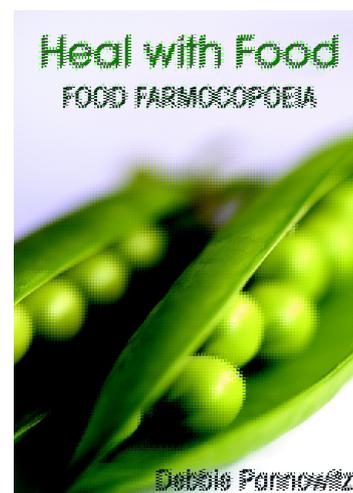


3. Get the most out of your pantry using medicinal foods

The book *Heal with Food*, written by a practicing nutritionist and former ACCESS director, covers over 100 conditions seen regularly in her clinic.

It guides the reader on what to eat as well as what to limit or perhaps avoid altogether. The focus is generally on what positive steps can be taken rather than a more negative approach of listing foods to avoid.

To find out more about the book visit www.healwithfood.com.au or to purchase Debbie's book or view a free sample, please go to the following link: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/148146>.



4. New ice age for wellbeing

Stem cell therapy in the Ukraine. Freezing eggs and umbilical cord blood. The commercialisation of medicine is flourishing. But Australian authorities say the trend is preying on people's medical insecurities, according to the Sydney Morning Herald. Access had the opportunity to contribute to an important story about recent changes and focus on various new services.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/new-ice-age-for-wellbeing-20120804-23m9t.html#ixzz22kScD87R>



5. The Top 10 Challenging Comments ...

In a follow-up to our last edition, this the second part of an article about dealing with some of the more difficult comments people make to you when you're dealing with infertility. This article comes from the AccessAustralia Chair, David Rawlings, who is also the author of the book [Swimming Upstream: the struggle to conceive](#)).

In my last article, I looked at the issue of the things that people say and why they say them. Why does an innocuous comment make you want to leap over the table and rip someone's head off? Why is it that if your mother or mother-in-law imparts 'wisdom' about conception it makes you want to hire a hit squad?

I found when researching [Swimming Upstream](#) that this basically came down to two things: myths and misinformation or awkwardness. [Check out the previous article for more information on this].

Most people who have run the infertility marathon of uncertainty have their own experiences of difficult questions and careless comments. They're so common in fact, that it's fairly easy to put together a list of the Top Ten Most Challenging Comments.

Number 10: "He just has to look at me and I get pregnant".

This comment usually stems from a point of ignorance. Most people who conceive easily have no or little understanding of how normal fertility works. They just know that all they do is have unprotected sex and the next thing they know another baby is on the way. Yes – there is pride and sometimes arrogance in having children. Probably though, this person is saying that having a family is no problem at all for them and they just can't understand why you would be having problems.

Number 9: "It's alright for you' you're on two incomes. You're just lucky."

Unfortunately, there are elements of judgement and assessment in this statement. Part of it could be that the person is jealous – particularly if they don't know about your fertility issues. You see, on the surface, the stereotyped couple without kids has what most families who may be on one income and struggling want – two incomes, nice house, nice car, holidays and time on their hands. So you appear ungrateful – you've got what they may want and yet you're miserable. But what they don't see is your pain in not having the family life they are able to experience. You can see that in 15-20 years' time, they have the option to work towards a nice car and a nice house, whereas, with delayed parenting you may be struggling later on.

Number 8: "You're just going to have to accept that you won't have children".

This is an age-old way of dealing with problems. – put things behind you and move on. Unfortunately, when you're dealing with emotions and pain that is as deep as this, it's not always that easy. This can also be advice given to cover uncomfortable feelings about your situation and the fact that they don't know how to help you or don't want to see you in pain any more. It can be a case of 'can't deal with it, don't want to know about it.' But the thing about infertility is that while it has a definite name, it usually has no definite beginning point and finding an ending can take years. There can be lots of years when you have no idea whether the 'end' will be you filling that little nursery room with your baby, or just having to realise that it just won't ever be that way. This statement assumes you can take a position of finality, of coming to a conclusion. When everything is uncertain for you, it can be difficult to hear statements that say 'you need to move on'.

Number 7: "You just need to be more positive" or "You just need to have more faith in God".

This comment is pretty judgmental and can be made from a patronising position. It also makes a number of assumptions. Firstly, it suggests your fertility is linked to your state of mind or your levels of faith. Secondly, that you need to take action that will give you back control over your fertility. As with most of these Top Ten



Comments, these statements devalue the emotions and feelings that you're going through. In terms of faith, comments like these are sometimes made when a well-meaning religious friend or family member doesn't know what to say next. It can be a statement said when people are trying to cope with your loss, grief and childless situation. They're trying to package it in a way that they can process, making sense of it within the bounds of their understanding of faith. Having more faith in God can be a simple answer to your problem perhaps because they have felt that it has worked for them in various circumstances. They wish life and religion to provide "fair" solutions and justice for all, despite strong evidence that bad things happen to good people. As far as positive thinking goes, most of us want to be able to deal positively with life's challenges. With fertility problems though, staying positive involves huge challenges as it often takes years before the outcome is known.

Number 6: (For those with secondary infertility) You should be grateful that you already have a beautiful child.

What people may be trying to say is that you're very blessed to have a beautiful child, make sure that you don't miss out on the experience of enjoying them grow up. But it can also be a belittling statement that says 'it's alright for me to have choices in how many children I have, but not you'. Once again, it's a reflection of just how hard it generally is for others to put themselves in your shoes. They are probably seeing things from their own perspective on parenting. For some people who find parenting pretty hard going, it can just be a touch of wishing they could have only one child to manage. It can also be a reflection of misunderstanding about how infertility is rarely a definite diagnosis and that trying different things over a period of time is just about the only way to going to know whether that wanted child will happen.

Number 5: We had a friend who tried X (where X equals adoption, IVF, having sex at precisely 3.48pm every afternoon for a week) and they got pregnant straight away.

People are often just trying to be positive when they give you examples of success stories. Unfortunately you'll hear them almost every day. They're meant to lift your spirits and help you feel more positive about your chances of conceiving. But what it does is make you feel like you've missed the boat once again. And if you've ever been on fertility treatment, it's not easy in any way, shape or form. When they're trying to be helpful, people don't remember the bad things. They will tell you about the child who was miraculously cured from a strange disease but they won't remember the hundreds of children who will die of the same condition. Another problem with anecdotes and individual stories is that they can often be adopted as gospel. For each person who adopted and fell pregnant, there are 19 others who didn't. The pregnancy rate for adoptive mothers is 5% - the same base pregnancy rate as for the general infertile population. Once again, one-off examples may be given to help or to provide you with an option that the person may think you had not already considered, but the inference there is that if you try it, it's guaranteed to work for you. Most of these sorts of examples and suggestions perpetuate myths about fertility, how it works and what can go wrong with it.

Number 4: "Don't you want children?"

Sometimes people just want to know what you're up to. They're just trying to work out why such a lovely couple would not want to be parents. It's a social expectation that people have and want children and the grand assumption is that if you wanted children you'd have them by now. It's also a reflection of the instant society we live in. If you want something, go and get it. People assume having children is just as easy as that.

Number 3: “What’s the matter? Shooting blanks?”

This is one men face regularly. Yes, people equate fertility with sexual capacity. It’s the James Bond argument. You score, therefore you are fertile. When men are talking about fertility problems, this comment can be quite common. There are several elements to it. Firstly, most guys don’t know how to handle anything to do with fertility, so they can try to brush off the subject with humour. Secondly, this comment exudes competition. The expectation is that you are shooting blanks and they aren’t. You remember back in school days when kids would be so cruel with their comments because they didn’t understand your situation? If you had glasses, you were four-eyes. If you had a severe acne problem, you were pizza-face. Those kids have grown up but the comments can still be just as hurtful and shaming. Your response to this comment will really depend on your situation. If you’ve been diagnosed with male factor infertility, your answers will vary from someone whose partner has a medical condition or a couple with unexplained infertility. But, regardless of your situation, this comment is pretty demeaning and thoughtless.

Number 2: “So when are you two going to have children?”

This old chestnut comes in at number two. Usually people are just curious. These comments can often happen when announcements of babies or pregnancies are made and the social secretary and general gossip of the group you’re with starts to beeline in on the next couple. The people we mix with, as part of our community, are interested in where we sit in the area of planning a family. After all, they have children wanting playmates. It’s another question that highlights life transitions. After being with your partner for a while, people start asking the question ‘when are you two getting engaged?’ When you’re engaged, it is ‘when are you two getting married?’ When you’re married, it is ‘when are you two having kids?’ When you’ve had one child, it is ‘how many will you have?’ And so the cycle goes.

Drum roll please. The number one comment that is given to couples having trouble conceiving ...

Number 1: “Just relax and I’m sure it will happen.”

If couples having fertility problems had a dollar for each time they’d heard this suggestion, they could afford to buy their own fertility clinic. So why do we hear this comment almost universally? People are just responding to a popular myth that relaxing in some way helps your fertility. The myth is that somehow there is a connection between sperm, eggs and relaxation. The reality is that if you needed relaxation to conceive, there would be no conception during war or after a rape – but it happens in these cases. Just think of it, it’s not just the relaxed people in the world who become parents and the cranky tense ones who don’t. People who provide this comment are just trying to help and are reflecting a social myth. And unfortunately, many people have anecdotes of how people relaxed and all of a sudden became pregnant. You’ll hear them. Each and every one of them. The little brother of this comment is “Why don’t you just take a holiday and relax? A friend of mine went away and got pregnant straight away.” While this may be true, sometimes the only reason that people conceived while they were away is that in an exotic location, they had more sex than if they were stuck at home.

So that’s the Top 10. But how do you respond to these comments? How can you manage the situation or conversation without just seething away quietly? We’ll look at that in our next article, and offer some tips on things you can say in particular situations.

Swimming Upstream is available online at www.swimmingupstream.com.au.



6. Risks flagged in India's fertility tourism

The revolutionary in vitro fertilization (IVF) technique that has given the world about five million new people in the 34 years since the birth the world's first test tube baby, Louise Brown, continues to court controversy in India.

Read the full story at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NH01Df01.html



7. Final frontiers of infertility to be cracked as five millionth IVF baby in the world is born

LUKE Taylor's arrival as the first - and long-awaited - child of Sarah and Michael was a monumental milestone for the Melbourne family.

But the eight-week-old's birth - which came as the five millionth "test tube" baby born in the world - is a milestone being celebrated more widely by the international IVF community as a justification of the legal and ethical battles waged, and the scientific boundaries pushed, since first proving the technology 39 years ago.

For the full story: http://www.news.com.au/national/final-frontiers-of-infertility-to-be-cracked-as-five-millionth-ivf-baby-in-the-world-is-born/story-fndo4cq1-1226437573009?from=public_rss



8. Don't forget to join us on Facebook!

Thanks to those members who've joined us on Facebook, shared their stories, asked questions and offered their comments. If you'd like to join in the conversation, we're sure there are other members who will benefit from hearing how you've addressed the issues you've faced ... along with the support of sharing your story in a safe community that understands what you're going through.

We realise that infertility can be a very personal time for some, while others enjoy being able to share their experience and learn from others. So what do you want to be able to do? Please let us know at info@access.org.au or simply post!

9. My story

The stories of our members inspire us. Dealing with infertility, treatment, adoption or moving on with life without children can be a personal journey and we thank those members who are willing to share their story as a way to help others.

In this edition, two of our members tell their story.

Paola Branas-Born (name used with her permission)

“We got married and tried naturally straight away, using NFM (natural fertility management), naturopath, then we discovered health challenges, and 12 months later we consulted the IVF clinic. We had male-related infertility, Y chromosome micro-deletion, that prevented us falling pregnant, plus high DNA fragmentation, which also added to the infertility.

We had herbs, naturopathic remedies, and acupuncture before and after transfer. Vitamins taken daily, massage, and network care. Assisted reproductive technologies was our only hope. We had six IVF/ICSI then we tried natural cycle with ICSI, until we decided to use Donor Sperm IUI 2nd Attempt we conceived first child. 13 months later tried Donor IUI and 3rd attempt we conceived our second child.

With IVF it was full stimulation, thus daily injections (2-4 per day) depending on protocol. Plus taking vitamins, supplement therapies and keeping as positive and calm as possible when each cycle kept failing. It took us 3.5 years, it was all we thought about and it was our life. At first we thought this was going to work for us, but it got very discouraging after the first attempt we got pregnant but miscarried at 6.5 weeks. So we had hope. Then as I got older the medical doctors told us about my ageing eggs, and so this added more pressure to us. We changed Doctor at one point as we needed to think outside the box.

Then after so much heart ache we decided to find our donor who was happy to help us create a family. I was 40 years old when I had Alexa and 42 when I had Oskar, they are truly the purpose of our lives..

Naturally we are forever grateful for our donor for making this happen.”

Jodie Gale (name used with her permission)

My husband and I started trying to conceive in April 2004.

After a few months we started investigations due to not falling pregnant. At our age 34 and 39, we were supposed to wait a year but having read ‘taking charge of your fertility’, I just felt that something wasn’t right. I had tests and got the all clear – my husband’s came back saying 0 sperm count. We were shocked but thought ‘oh well, we’ll just get take herbs, acupuncture, whatever and we’ll have IVF’. We spent a year exploring various things, spending a fortune on alternative health medicines and clinics. Then my husband saw a urologist/had operation etc and we realised that 0 sperm meant 0 sperm. We were frustrated and angry that no-one had told us what this really meant. No amount of alternative therapy would ‘grow’ sperm. Finding out we couldn’t have children was the most devastating day of our lives. We both sought individual

and couples psychotherapy to work through our feelings of anger, sadness, shame, not feeling good enough etc. We were living in the UK at the time and IVF was expensive so we moved forward our move home to Australia.

In January 2007, we started IVF in Newcastle because we couldn't find anywhere with sperm in Sydney – we would have had to have waited on a wait list which we were told would take another year. I read many books on using a sperm donor and raising donor conceived children – choosing a sperm donor was an interesting experience and not something that sat right with me – nevertheless I ignored my gut and went with it anyway. My underlying, small voice inside said, 'why would you want to carry another man's child?'. Because my husband worked – I drove myself to IVF treatment in Newcastle. It was painful, draining and stressful. I did 13 cycles of IVF with no positive result. I spent most of those years feeling depressed due to the drugs and battled the roller coaster of hope and hopelessness.

In 2008, we decided to go to the Intercountry adoption training – I had thought about adopting from China as a teenager and in my 20s. When I was 15 I said to my mother – I don't want to have children – I want to adopt from China. My mother thought this odd coming from a 15-year-old. I had read a story about Chinese babies in orphanages and felt deep sadness and empathy for the babies.

We did the training and realised that age wise we were getting on and that most programs had slowed down. We were told it would take another 4-6 years. At the training there was a lady from DOCS talking about permanent care (long term foster care). We spent time thinking about it and decided to attend the 'shared lives shared stories' foster care training. We were told that there is no such thing as permanent care in NSW, rather permanency planning and the correct name was 'long term foster care'. Before going any further – I went to see a psychotherapist to help me to mourn the loss of a biological child and also, the loss of adopting from China. I chose a 60+ year old gay therapist – someone who had never been a mother – to help me move through my grief. I felt that it was important to our future child/children to move past that before they came into our lives. Assessment process was rigorous – many people complain about the depth of questioning – I see it as essential. Many people complain that you have to have stopped IVF for a year – I also see this as essential. If your heart is still attached to a biological child – I wonder how one bonds with their future child. For me – bonding started the minute we sent in our foster care forms. We waited a year or so and then got a call in December 2011 asking if we were interested in 2 children, a boy 11 months and girl 2.2 years. I couldn't believe it when we were told that they were from an Asian background – it just felt like we'd come full circle. 3 days later we met our beautiful children and transitioned over Christmas time. They came home to us in early January.

It's not all a bed of roses – we have had to go through a court case where the biological parents were seeking restoration. The court determined that the children will remain in our care until they are 18 years old. This was the darkest and most stressful period of our lives. When we made a decision to take the kids, we hadn't bonded with them or ever loved a child before so we said yes knowing about the upcoming court case. Once we bonded with them and loved them – it was 5 months of hell waiting to find out the outcome. We also have regular visitation with birth-parents. We support this as best as we can – it is important for our children to know that they can love their birth parents. Many carers have issues with this – I think this is sometimes about our own insecurity. Visitation is hard. It is hard to hear the kids calling someone else 'Mummy'. At the end of the day, we need to work through this the best we can – without the birth-parents – we would never have the opportunity to be parents to such adorable little beings. We try our hardest to feel compassion and empathy for our birth-parents – after all – they have lost a child/children. Anyone who has gone through IVF



knows the pain of this – the loss of a dream baby, miscarriage, loss of embryos etc. For anyone considering long-term foster care after infertility – consider this very carefully! It is more waiting, more not knowing and more rollercoaster riding. We had a good outcome but some don't – I know two families where the children were restored to birth-parents.

It has been important for me to find the value, meaning and purpose of our infertility. The value for me was meeting a wonderful online support group – many of whom I meet with regularly in real life. Most of them had pregnancies – this was so painful at the time. Now our kids are the same ages. We chat daily in a private facebook group and it has been a Godsend for me to have a bunch of women who know what we have gone through. The day our kids came home, they were as excited and as nervous as we were!

When I reflect back – I didn't listen to that quiet inner voice. I have always know deep inside that I wanted to adopt. I don't regret IVF because I met a such amazing, strong and resilient women but I'd probably bypass it next time!

Before our children came to us, my husband and I felt that we had reached a place of acceptance around our infertility. We felt that we had moved from the mindset of being childless to childfree. We didn't want to spend the rest of our lives being unhappy. I think it is possible to be happy whether pregnancy is achieved or not. I am a psychotherapist and I specialise in women's issues, including infertility and alternative parenting paths. I often work with women who through therapy, have achieved a sense of acceptance and happiness in life. It takes a lot of work and a lot of inner reflection but it is possible. They usually find that they give birth to something other than a child – a new business or career, a new relationship, a creative expression like art or music, they start taking better care of what we call in therapy the 'inner child' or like us, become parents through foster-care or adoption. You can get in contact with Jodie via www.facebook.com/mindfulwomen and www.facebook.com/infertilitycounselling.

Our heartfelt thanks to Paola and Jodie for sharing their stories. If you'd like to do the same, please email David at news@access.org.au. We will respect your anonymity if you wish to remain anonymous.



News articles:

Treatment and infertility issues in the global news in the past month:

- Fewer cradles to rock in Kerala, The Asian Age, India
< <http://www.asianage.com/kochi/fewer-cradles-rock-kerala-093> >
- Men responsible for 40% infertility, The Nation, Nigeria
< <http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/index.php/health/55148-%E2%80%98men-responsible-for-40%25-infertility%E2%80%99.html> >
- Failed IVF treatment linked to depression/anxiety, Fox News, USA
< <http://www.foxnews.com/health/2012/06/28/failed-ivf-attempt-tied-to-depression-anxiety/> >



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1800 888 896
www.access.org.au
info@access.org.au



- Sperm sequencing could help fight infertility, New Scientist, USA
< <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn22081-sperm-sequencing-could-help-fight-infertility.html> >
- A teen's lesson in infertility, NZ Herald, New Zealand
< http://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=10820173 >
- Season with the best odds for IVF, Wall Street Journal, USA
< <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303644004577524824251585782.html> >
- Emotional aid important when facing infertility, deseret.com, USA
< <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/765594962/Emotional-aid-important-when-facing-infertility.html?pg=all> >
- Startling admissions in IVF journal, BioEdge, UK
< http://www.bioedge.org/index.php/bioethics/bioethics_article/10180 >
- 'I want to be first IVF Miss World', The Press Association, UK
< <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ukpress/article/ALeqM5gign9T0BRwbbiZMGSEgpGOG4auzQ?docId=N0283221344251214397A> >
- Austria's first IVF baby is thirty, Austrian Independent, Austria
< http://austrianindependent.com/news/General_News/2012-08-06/11872/Austrias_first_IVF_baby_is_thirty >



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