

The surprising power of the pill

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Women who have tried to conceive using in vitro fertilization (IVF) methods are painfully aware that timing is of the essence. There are cancelled vacations, too many sick days taken from work, and the necessity to plan everything around “the treatment.”

But thanks to a Tel Aviv University study, trying for a baby has just been made easier. In a surprising finding, researchers have discovered that the same pill used to prevent pregnancy can actually help a woman conceive.

Dr. Haim Pinkas MD, a senior physician at the Rabin Medical Center and an academic staff member of Tel Aviv University’s Sackler School of Medicine, and his colleagues at the infertility center where he practices, have found that a two-week intervention treatment using a standard low-dose birth control pill can help time egg harvesting, making the IVF process more convenient for both doctor and patient.

The study was done on 1,800 women at the Infertility and IVF Unit, Helen Schneider Hospital for Women, Rabin Medical Center, Petach Tikva and appeared in the Journal of Assisted Reproduction & Genetics in January of this year.

All in the Timing

According to the American Fertility Association, more than 15% of American couples have difficulty conceiving a child. There are currently two types of therapy — natural methods and assisted reproductive techniques such as IVF. In many cases, IVF offers the last hope to

conceive a child.

Convenience is a factor that contributes to a woman's general peace of mind and health. But from a clinician's point of view, the ability to time the IVF process is also crucial.

Dr. Pinkas explains, "One of the main drawbacks in treating infertility is timing a woman's body with the clinic's schedule, so we can get as many mature eggs as possible. IVF clinics can be extremely busy. With a proven and safe method for timing when a woman can undergo therapy, there is a lot less stress placed on the physicians' shoulders too."

Normally doctors start the IVF treatment from the moment a woman gets her period. But the use of birth control pills, for 10-14 days after a period, allows the treatment to be adjusted without compromising the "ovarian response to stimulation," says Dr. Pinkas. This way, egg-harvesting can fall on a date mutually convenient to both the clinician and patient.

Study Is Unique and Broad

This study is not the first to investigate the use of the pill in IVF, but it is the largest one performed so far. It is also unique in that it placed an emphasis on the impact of a patient's age, her ovarian response, the characteristics of her cycle, and the final outcome – a birth.

The bottom line is that the treatment gives a woman comfort without compromising her chances to conceive. Dr. Pinkas says, "The IVF process can be very stressful. Adding to that stress is the timing issue. Women need to be able to get on with their lives. This treatment makes it possible."

And while old wives' tales persist about days of the month when women

can conceive, Dr. Pinkas says it is bunk. “The timing of ovulation for different women is spaced out evenly throughout the year. We can schedule a woman’s ovulation with contraceptive pills, but not with the moon.”

Source: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

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