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Health Aspirin 'doubles IVF pregnancy chances

Aspirin could improve the chances of IVF success

Aspirin may improve a woman's chance of conceiving, according to an Argentinian study.

The research is part of ongoing studies into aspirin and infertility which have proved inconclusive.

It showed that low doses of aspirin given in combination with in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment almost doubled the chances of a woman getting pregnant.

The headache medicine is thought to increase blood flow in many areas of the body by relaxing the blood vessels.

It is used to prevent heart disease and the fertility researchers claim it increases blood flow to the ovaries and womb.

Daily dose

The study by doctors in Argentina is published in Fertility and Sterility - the journal of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine.

It compared two groups of 149 women. One group took a daily dose of 100mg of aspirin at the same time as IVF drugs to stimulate the ovaries, the other group just took the IVF drugs.

Forty-five per cent of the women who took aspirin became pregnant, compared with 28% of the control group.

On average, almost twice as many eggs were retrieved from the women who took aspirin than those who did not.

The researchers, led by Dr Ester Polak de Fried of the CER Medical Institute in Buenos Aires, said: "Low-dose aspirin treatment significantly improves ovarian response, uterine and ovarian blood flow velocity, implantation rate and pregnancy rate in patients undergoing IVF."

They concluded: "Aspirin seems to be a useful, effective and safe treatment in patients who undergo assisted reproductive technologies."

Divided opinion

But Peter Wardle, honorary secretary of the British Fertility Society, said the study was too small to be conclusive and other larger studies had suggested no big difference in fertility rates.

"Opinion is fairly divided. Small studies suggest there is a difference while larger studies suggest there isn't.

"If there were a consistent pattern, every IVF unit would use it."

He added that some infertile women might benefit from low doses of aspirin.

Research suggests that people with autoimmune diseases, those with a family history of blood clots

or recurrent miscarriage might benefit from aspirin, he said.

Women with a family history of recurrent miscarriage may have a mild form of a syndrome which causes early miscarriage.

However, tests to identify the condition are very expensive, costing up to £1,000 - much more than the cost of giving someone aspirin.

Rather than test for the condition, Mr Wardle says some IVF clinics suggest women who have had several unsuccessful IVF cycles or have a family history of recurrent miscarriage should take a quarter of a tablet of aspirin a day.

Professor Ian Craft of the London Fertility Centre said he thought most people should take aspirin, given its beneficial effects in preventing heart disease and blood clots.

He said: "It should be routine. Aspirin is the most major drug in the last few decades and very few people are intolerant of it. I take a tablet every day myself."

Fertility drugs

About 6,000 babies a year are born in the UK to otherwise infertile couples as a result of in vitro fertilisation.

There are several different IVF techniques, but the main process involves the woman taking fertility drugs to help her produce more eggs.

The eggs are then harvested and fertilised in the laboratory.

The woman is given hormone drugs to prepare her womb to receive the fertilised eggs.

The fertilised eggs are placed inside the womb and a normal pregnancy follows.