

## **WHY DOES IVF SOMETIMES FAIL**

Although for many IVF has been a miracle, for others it remains an expensive and invasive procedure that did not give them their longed for baby. It is not a sure thing and although I fully support the appropriate use of IVF I am also realistic in what it is able to achieve.

People often ask me “why did it fail?”, or “what can I do to improve my chances next time? “, we often do not know for sure but can glean some level of diagnosis from the cycle itself. Think about the following:

- . How many follicles did you produce?
- . Did they grow evenly on both ovaries?
- . Were they good quality?
- . How many fertilized and became embryos?
- . Were they able to freeze any embryos?
- . How was the quality of the sperm?
- . Was your partner able to easily produce a sample?
- . Did they need to use ICSI ?
- . Did they transfer them on day 3 or 5?
- . Did your endometrium thicken fully?
- . Did you get an early pregnancy that failed to continue?

Chinese medicine does offer another level of understanding and often gives the patient direction and hope that they *can do things themselves* that may affect outcome in future cycles. But sometimes it can indicate that another cycle may not be a good idea, this can be hard to take. For example if their embryos were poor quality and there were not many produced; this can indicate a decline in Kidney Yin and does not bode well. These people may well do better using natural methods to improve their chances since the embryos may not withstand the rigors of IVF.

However, if there were a good number of embryos produced , and/or a high level of fertilization yet the pregnancy still failed – this may indicate that we need to work on the implantation phase, but also that it is worth pursuing the IVF. Did the

endometrium thicken? If not some good preparation looking at the information on nourishing Blood may improve things.

**Embryo quality:** the quality of our embryos declines with age, this is the most common reason for IVF failure in older women. But by no means the only reason. The FSH is a reasonable indicator of Ovarian reserve and a high FSH (over 10) may indicate that the response (i.e the number and quality of embryos produced) to IVF may be poor. These women may well be put on a high dose of stimulation drugs in an attempt to produce a higher number of embryos.

**Endometrium problems:** either in the thickness of the endometrium or in the level of scarring. Both of these problems can lead to a failure of the embryo to implant successfully. In the case of the endometrium being too thin, clinics will offer Viagra. Studies show a mixed outcome and from my experience if the patient is very Blood def or Yin def then putting them on Viagra does not help much. The key here is in the preparation. The problem is quite common when the patient enters into an IVF cycle without preparation following 3 or more IUI cycles using Clomaphene (Clomid). Scarring from previous abdominal surgery or from C-sections or D &C can also interfere with implantation and the extent of the scarring will determine the ability to reverse the damage.

**Immune issues:** this is a hot bed of controversy and not for the scope of this book. I see this as a very interesting area and one that will develop over the next ten years. It does however, require more research I also think it is an area where Chinese medicine and complementary therapies have a great deal to offer.

#### **Antiphosolipid antibodies (APA):**

**The presence of APA's:** are more likely to form clots and to have a history of miscarriage. They would be treated with blood thinners such as heparin and aspirin

**Natural killer cells (NK cells):** naturally occurring in the uterus. Some clinics are looking at levels of NK cells in the blood and if so are treated with heraprin, steroid, aspirin and sometimes IVIG (intravenous immunoglobulin) – to date, this remains a popular but controversial treatment.

Like with everything in fertility I think it is important to keep an open mind. This is a relatively new area in medicine and the data is still being collected. I am not a scientist but I do see many people who have had failed IVF cycles with perfect embryos, who find that their immune system was in some way impairing the implantation process. Watch this space I think we will see more in this area in the coming years.

**Sperm quality:** ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection) has been the major breakthrough in treating male infertility since it allows IVF clinics to inject sperm directly into the egg. This does improve fertilization rates in IVF which gives the patients a larger number of embryos to choose from. However, it does not guarantee implantation