

40 YEARS OF IVF:

INSIDE THE FERTILITY TREATMENT THAT KEEPS SPARKING CONTROVERSY

Five million
IVF babies
born since
Louise in '78

Four decades since IVF's first success, Closer speaks to women who've experienced the highs and lows of the process

In the 40 years since Brit Lesley Brown became the first woman to fall pregnant after pioneering new fertility treatment, almost six million babies have been born across the world thanks to In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

Lesley, then 29, and her husband John Brown, then 39, had spent nine years trying to conceive before they were treated by the Bourn Hall clinic in Cambridgeshire and their daughter Louise was born in July 1978. Now, every year, 50,000 women in the UK visit an IVF clinic hoping to become mums.

HELPING FAMILIES

Professor Tim Child, medical director of Oxford Fertility, says, "Infertility is a disease that can have severe psychological ramifications. And, like any disease, if it can be cured using medicine, then why wouldn't you try it? IVF has helped millions of families.

"But success rates vary, and the mother's age is one of the biggest determining factors. If a woman is under 35 then there's a 40 per cent chance of her having a baby through IVF. Once a woman is 40 and over the chance is 20-25 per cent."

One of these mothers is Maria Coole, 47, a lifestyle journalist, who turned to IVF when she struggled to conceive her second child.

She says, "I had a scarred fallopian tube so I needed help from a fertility drug during my first pregnancy with my daughter Elsie. After a couple of years of trying for a second baby, with my 40th looming, too, my gynaecologist advised me bluntly that it was 'now or never' with IVF."

Because of Maria's age, she and her partner Nigel had to have IVF privately and spent £5,000.

She says, "I was upset we had no choice, but I was never stressed or emotional during the entire process and the injections became a normal part of our daily routine. We only told a few people what

we were going through, as I wanted to protect myself from people's questions if it was unsuccessful.

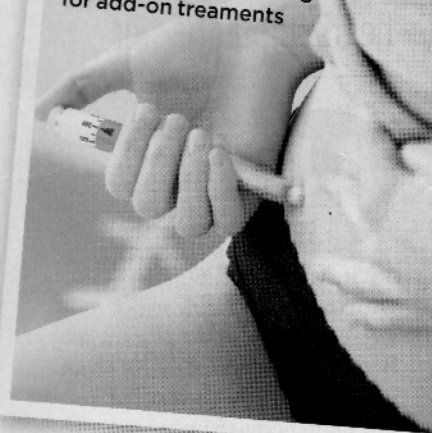
"We were so lucky that our IVF worked first time and Sylvie celebrated her eighth birthday last month."

BABY BUSINESS

While it's helped millions of couples, in recent years, the highly lucrative "baby-making business" has attracted controversy.

Although NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) recommends local health authorities offer three rounds of IVF on the NHS, most cannot afford to and some areas are seriously considering stopping funding altogether, forcing the majority of couples to pay for their own treatment.

Many women are opting for add-on treatments



However, one round can cost as much as £15,000 and many private clinics have been accused of taking advantage of desperate couples by offering expensive extras that may not be of any benefit.

Susan Seenan, chief executive of The Fertility Network, says, "Clinics in the UK aren't always honest about whether a particular add-on – such as extra blood tests or immunology – will work for their patients."

"The British Fertility Society is very clear that a lot of these add-on treatments don't have any evidence behind them, but clinics are still selling them – at a cost of around £800, sometimes thousands. Human Fertilisation Embryology Authority website Hfea.gov.uk has clear information on which treatments have been proven, and which may actually be harmful to your health."



Jessica went through 11 failed rounds of IVF



Maria had success with daughter Sylvie

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REAL LIFE REPORT

'It cost me £80K & 18 years to be a mum'

After 18 years of fertility treatment, costing £80,000, Louise Warneford, now 50, finally became a mum last year.

She says, "When I met my husband Mark, 55, a driver for the Ministry of Defence, in 1999, we knew we both wanted children, but Mark had had a vasectomy following the birth of his two daughters with a previous partner.

"It couldn't be reversed so we chose to have IVF, using donor sperm. I knew it wasn't going to be a straightforward journey, but I didn't realise how hard it would be.

"As Mark had daughters, we weren't eligible for NHS treatment, so we went private in 2001. The drugs were awful and I had so many mood swings, but when I tested positive, I was thrilled.

"However, at ten weeks, I lost the baby. I knew I had to carry on and I told myself that it would work next time.

"Over the next 10 years I went through a further 17 rounds of IVF, all of which ended in miscarriage. We scrimped and saved to afford it. It was hell, but the drive to become a mother consumed me. I could get pregnant, but I couldn't hold on to the baby. I had test after test, but doctors couldn't find anything wrong.

"In 2010, after my 18th round of IVF, I suffered a late miscarriage at 14 weeks. I went for a routine scan and they told me the baby had no heartbeat.

She says, "I've written a book – *The Pursuit Of Motherhood* – about my experiences. I've transformed my life into something amazing out of all the sadness. But that doesn't mean I don't think about what could have been every day."

She adds, "I don't have any regrets about IVF, but I do believe the industry needs to

Louise and Mark finally had son William



I started screaming. I couldn't take any more. I was 42 and I thought it was my last chance.

"But, after reading about killer cells that attack foetuses, I found out about specialist centre, The Miscarriage Clinic, in Epsom. I went for a test and it came out positive. I was then told they had a treatment with an 85 per cent success rate.

"I was too old to have IVF in the UK, so in 2015, we travelled to Prague to use a donor egg and sperm and then continued treatment at Epsom throughout my pregnancy.

"After falling pregnant for the 19th time, William was born on 1 June 2016. I was smitten. William's now 16 months and he's just gorgeous. All the years of heartache and devastation were worth it."

help women more with the emotional side of going through treatment. It's an incredibly tough journey and we need to be supported more, particularly when it doesn't work."

● This week is National Fertility Awareness Week. For more information, visit www.nfaw.org.uk or Tommys.org

'NO ONE WARNED US IT MIGHT NOT WORK OR HOW HARD IT MIGHT BE. MY EMOTIONS WERE ALL OVER THE PLACE'

Jessica Hepburn, 46, an arts producer from London, spent £70,000 on 11 rounds of IVF in her bid to become a mum. But after multiple miscarriages and an ectopic pregnancy that almost killed her, she was forced to give up.

CRUSHED DREAMS

She says, "When I was 34, my partner Peter and I started trying for a baby. We assumed we wouldn't have any difficulties, but when nothing happened after a year we decided to go to a fertility clinic. After a series of tests, in December 2005, doctors diagnosed us with unexplained infertility. We had IVF, but no one warned us it might not work or how hard it would be. My emotions were all over the place."

Jessica says she tried

numerous add-on treatments in the hope they would help.

She adds, "I had a stranger's white blood cells injected into my arm to boost my immune system. But nothing worked and it left us crushed. The constant treatment was so gruelling and emotionally draining."

Jessica says the process caused tension in her marriage and the couple almost split up.

She says, "We argued a lot, re-mortgaged our house and maxed out our credit cards to be able to afford the treatment."

The couple spent £70,000 but, eventually, in 2013, decided to stop. Jessica says, "Just before my 43rd birthday, I went in for one last round, but it wasn't successful."

Now Jessica's life has taken a totally different direction.