

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

**I**n 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.

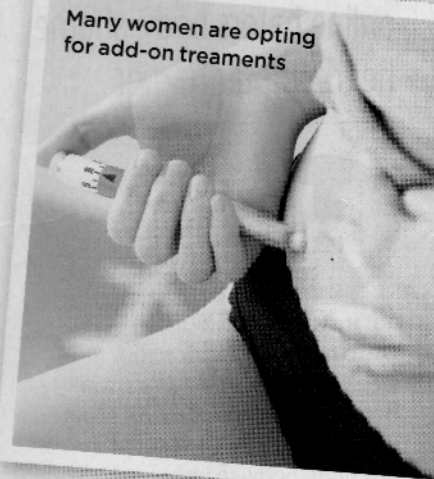
"We were so lucky that our IVF worked first time and Sylvie celebrated her eighth birthday last month."

## 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



Jessica went through 11 failed rounds of IVF



Maria had success with daughter Sylvie

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."

