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Watch that clock

Age matters when it comes to making babies. Don't wait till it's too late

By April Chua

WHEN Mr Peter Lim and his wife Fredda tied the knot in 1999, having kids was already "very much" in their plans.

However, in the first two years after getting married, they were busy enjoying their sojourn in a new city – London – where Mr Lim was posted to for work. When they returned to Singapore in 2001, the couple put all their energies into their careers, and did not consciously try to start a family.

It was only in the fifth year of their marriage that Linus Mark was born. The couple call their son, now six, a "little miracle," and it is for good reasons.

Mr Lim, 43, who is a director of markets at accounting firm KPMG, says 2003 was "a year of awakening" for them. "When we finally and conscientiously started trying for a baby, we realised that conception did not happen merely because we wanted it. It could neither be timed, nor willed," he says.

In early 2003, the couple decided to seek medical advice to boost their chances of conception. Mr Lim was told he suffered from varicocele, a condition where the quality of sperms is affected due to a collection of dilated veins that sits above the testes, while Mrs Lim was found to have blocked fallopian tubes as well as cysts and blood clots in a laparoscopy. Both conditions could affect conception.

Deciding whether to go for the laparoscopy was not easy for Mrs Lim. "I have a very low threshold for

pain. Like many people, I did not like the idea of having to undergo a surgical procedure. But in my mind, I wanted to do whatever it took to fulfil our dream of parenthood.

"Since we had decided to seek medical advice and this was the recommendation, and because we had a friend whose wife underwent the same procedure and then conceived, I decided to overcome the initial apprehension and stepped out in faith," says the 34-year-old vocal coach and piano teacher.

The couple's miracle happened that very same year. When the doctor announced that Mrs Lim was pregnant, they were both speechless. "Suddenly, all the tears and pain did not matter anymore," recalls Mr Lim, who documented their story, along with that of 10 other couples who overcame infertility, in his self-published book, *Little Miracles – the Journey to Parenthood*.

Senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist with Gleneagles Hospital, Dr Peter Chew, who is also the chairman of aLife, a voluntary

MaybeBaby? Journey to Parenthood

At the Maybe Baby 2010 seminar at the NTUC Auditorium on May 8, experts will discuss topics such as achieving work-life harmony and understanding finances, fertility and sexual intimacy issues. For more information about Maybe Baby 2010 seminar, please call 6319-1735 during office hours or visit www.maybebaby.sg

welfare organisation which provides assistance and counselling services relating to fertility and pregnancy, advises couples to seek medical help early if they suspect they may be facing fertility issues so that "appropriate treatment can be instituted expeditiously".

"Our understanding of the physiology of egg and sperm reinforces the notion that time waits for no one. It is important for couples who are busy with their careers to realise that their biological clocks are ticking away and they should not wait for problems of infertility to surface. They should try to complete the family as early as they can," he adds.



Hard facts on conception:

- ✓ A woman's chances of conceiving decline with her age. Fertility in a woman decreases steadily after she hits 30 years, with a marked reduction after 35, and a sharp decline after 40. At age 20-24, she has about 25 per cent chance of conceiving naturally in each monthly cycle. This drops to 10 per cent when she hits 30 and less than 5 per cent after 40.
- ✓ It is estimated that one out of three women above 35 will have problems conceiving.
- ✓ Older women face increased chances of miscarriage from genetic causes. They are also more likely to suffer from diabetes and hypertension while pregnant. These conditions can lead to other complications, such as premature birth, stillbirth and difficulties in delivery.
- ✓ Increased chances of abnormalities in babies: Statistics have shown that chromosomal abnormalities (such as Down's Syndrome) increase with the women's age. The risk of Down's Syndrome at 35 is about 1 in 400 pregnancies and at 40, 1 out of 100.
- ✓ Recent studies have also found that the quality and quantity of sperm decline after a man hits 35 years old. Beyond 50, sperm chromosomal abnormalities also become more common. Risks of miscarriage and abnormalities in babies increase as the man's age increases.

— from Dr Peter Chew, senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist with Gleneagles Hospital, and chairman of aLife