

Fact sheet #2: Fertility myth 1 - we can control our fertility

If you're investigating why you aren't pregnant by now and it's taking longer than you expected, it may surprise you to learn that not all of the things you believe about fertility are true. One major reason why you are wondering why this is happening to you is that you probably believe the myths in our society about fertility. There are four of them - this is number one.

"Rather naively, my wife gave up a very good job to have children. We just didn't think that we'd have problems." - Simon, 38

This may be the first generation to perpetuate the fertility myth on a global scale. It's certainly the first generation to expect and demand what it sees as a right to have children.

And while myths about fertility have been around for ages, at least in ancient times, they didn't just assume that they were in control of everything. Many ancient cultures made sacrifices to fertility gods in order to protect the growth of their tribe or clan - from Indian culture with its terracotta elephants used as wedding offerings to the ancient Egyptians with frogs as fertility symbols to the Aztecs appeasing their fertility goddess with human sacrifices.

As late as two generations ago, people understood that bad things happened and they just seemed to accept them. They hoped for the best and yet they had this underlying expectation that things could go 'against the plan'. Generations knew that babies wouldn't necessarily come when you wanted them to. Sometimes babies needed to be nursed through disease or injury. Sometimes children came at alarming regularity until you had a family of 14 or didn't arrive at all. And yet these generations seemed to accept this and get on with 'their lot in life'. They lived with the hand they were dealt and accepted it as such.

Our society expects to be in control. We sit in our armchairs and change channels by only lifting one finger. We punch our mobile phones and have everything delivered to our door. We communicate with people around the world in an instant and have our information needs met straight away. If we don't get our pizza in ten minutes ... well, we're not paying for it at all.

And if we don't like our lot in life, we change it. If we're too fat, we diet. If we're too ugly, we have plastic surgery. If our clothes are shabby, we buy more. If we don't have any money, we get credit cards. If we don't like who we are there are self-help courses, self-improvement books and stuff like that.

The flow on from this is that we think that we can control our fertility. We put precautions in place to make sure that 'unwanted' pregnancies don't happen. So, logically it should follow that once those precautions are lifted, pregnancy occurs. I mean, if you put a tap into a waterline to stop the flow, once the tap is open the water flows, right? Unfortunately, not always with your fertility.

Recent media coverage is now talking about how couples are delaying conception until later in life, confident that they will 'fit children in' when they've finished careers or whatever else they want to achieve.

Perhaps that's why it's hard to accept it when things don't happen as you thought they would. Apart from highlighting our belief that we have a right to have children, it highlights our need for control and we don't handle it well when we don't have it. If you expect that you are in control, then you assume that events are controllable. So if you're not in control, then someone else must be. So you can look around for someone to blame. And sometimes there is no one or nothing to blame. It is this point that probably causes so much pain to people who are forced to wait for children to come. This confusion and pain can hurt more than any medical condition.

You'll find the other three fertility myths our society believes in in *Swimming Upstream*, a new book that looks with a down-to-earth perspective at the issues couples face. Visit www.swimmingupstream.com.au to read excerpts, order your copy or find out how the book has helped other couples.

