ONE IS NICE, TWO IS FUN AND THREE IS CROWDED!

By: Dr. Mohd Suhaimi Hassan

Having twins or multiple pregnancy seems to be the desire of most couples who undergone fertility treatment. What could be better than completing your family in one go, with twins or even more babies? However the reality is that for many twins and triplets, life can be fragile and difficult.

Reproductive specialists are always being pressured by couples to put in more than 2 embryos during their IVF treatment. Putting in more embryos would result in higher pregnancy rate but the rate of higher order multiples such as twins and triplets also increases.

At present, about 1 in 4 IVF pregnancies lead to a multiple birth. This means that after IVF/ICSI, you are around 20 times more likely to have a multiple pregnancy than you would be if you have conceived naturally. Women should understand that the human womb was created for just one baby. Having two is fun but three is a crowd for a small womb.

Yes, we do understand that having twins or multiples are fun, but it is not without risks. Compared to having one baby, twins and other multiples are more likely to have serious and even life threatening health problems. The risks may involve both the mother and baby.

It can cause early or late miscarriage more than singleton. Medical condition risks such as gestational diabetes and pregnancy induced hypertension tend to be higher in women with multiple pregnancies. Women with gestational diabetes will have the risk of sudden intra uterine death which can be devastating to women who has been waiting long to get pregnant.

Twins are five times more likely than single birth babies to die within a month of birth. There are many reasons for this which includes being born prematurely i.e. born before the actual expected time, small size of the baby (low birth weight) and possibly birth defects which include cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is more likely found in premature babies.  

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ARE MY SPERMS FIT & HEALTHY?
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Poor sperm production and quality are the most common reasons for male infertility as it decreases the chances of sperms fertilizing the egg for conception. According to the World Health Organization, the normal concentration of sperm is at least 15 million per ml of semen. Fewer than that is considered a low sperm count, also called Oligozoospermia.

To reach and fertilize an egg, sperms must move forward, wriggling and swimming through a woman’s cervix, uterus and fallopian tubes. This is known as progressive motility. You are most likely to be fertile if at least 40 percent of your sperms are moving forward. The evaluation of the various shapes of sperm is termed morphology.

Sperms are designated normal or abnormal based on W.H.O 2010 sperm criteria. It is believed that sperm morphology with more than 4% normal per ml of semen may correlate with the ability of sperms to penetrate and fertilize eggs. High percentage of abnormal sperms is termed Teratozoospermia.

In some cases, morphology is used to decide whether a couple should go through in vitro fertilization (IVF) or Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) to attempt a pregnancy although the percentage of progressive motility are normal. Oligozoospermia and Teratozoospermia can happen due to a wide variety of reasons and contributing factors like genetic trait, mumps, undescended testis or high fever before puberty, hormonal abnormalities, infected semen, infection in the prostate gland, varicoceles enlargement of veins within the scrotum which increased testicular temperature, damaged sperm ducts, use of anabolic steroids, cigarette smoking, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, toxic chemicals, certain medications, heavy metal exposure and radiation.

If you have no sperms or Azospermia, your fertility doctor can retrieve your sperms surgically. If your sperms quality is poor due to varicoceles it can be corrected with corrective surgery. Also stay away from harmful household or occupational chemicals which may have some bearings on your sperms.

Age can also affect pregnancy rate. Sperm progressive motility and the proportion of normal sperm tend to decrease with age. Some research shows that it takes longer for men in their mid-30s and early 40s to achieve pregnancy than it does for younger men.

Dietary supplements or anti oxidants have been shown to improve sperm morphology or fertility. Antioxidants such as vitamin C & E, zinc, selenium and folic acid can help improve the DNA of the sperms.

Getting plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes may help boost fertility. Avoid tobacco, refined carbohydrates, coffee, tea, alcohol and foods with artificial additives. Maintain your ideal weight. Food deprivation in men leads to loss of sex drive and structural changes to reproductive tissue leading to infertility.

Obesity, on the other hand, can be associated with a low sperm count and impotence, possibly because of higher temperatures caused by excess fat near the testes.

Since up to 30% of infertility problem is related to male infertility, it is important for the guys to play their part and take charge of their nutrition to support their partners in this journey on a successful pregnancy. So, what does a guy need to do? Start by improving diet loaded with nutrients and minimizing processed and junk foods. Reduce exposure to chemicals and avoid household chemicals. Stop smoking and reduce alcohol intake. You can also meet with your gynaecologist that specializes in fertility to learn about specific nutrients and recommended dosages to help with sperm quality focusing on low concentration, morphology, and motility.