

Egg Donation — A boon to elderly infertile couples

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IN this day and age more and more career oriented women are getting married late in their life. By the time they start planning for their child, they are nearing the fourth decade of their life (40 years). Fortunately at this age, many women conceive naturally. However nearly 10 to 15% women fail to conceive within a year's time. These women who are more than 37-40 years of age then resort to treatment of infertility by their gynaecologist. If they still do not become pregnant they take help of newer technologies like in IVF vitro-fertilisation (test-tube baby) or ICSI (intra cytoplasmic sperm injection).

But at this late age many of the women fail to conceive with the help of newer technologies because of fewer eggs in their ovaries or the quality of the eggs they produce is poor. Furthermore, after the age of 40 to 42, many women stop producing eggs as they enter the stage of perimenopause (decreased periods) or menopause (stoppage of periods). Till now such women could only have a baby through the wonderful route of adoption. However, in the last ten years, a new technique of egg donation has come as a blessing to such women.

In egg donation, eggs are borrowed from another woman

called the donor (with her consent) These eggs are then fertilized with the sperms of the husband of the recipient woman and the resultant embryo (the earliest form of the baby) is inserted into the womb of the recipient. According to Dr. Pai, "the success rate of this procedure is in the region of 30 to 40% and many women till age of 50-55 have become pregnant by this technique." He adds that the oldest woman who conceived by this procedure is 69 years old, residing in Italy.

In our country, more preference is given to younger couples for adopting children. Couple more than 45 years can adopt, but find it difficult to do so, because of governmental preference for younger parents. Such couples can be tremendously benefited by egg donation.

Dr. Nandita Palshetkar of Lilavati Hospital adds that egg donation can also be done in women who have had multiple cycles of test-tube baby (IVF or ICSI) and have still failed to conceive and become pregnant.

According to Dr. Hrishikesh Pai, generally eggs are borrowed from healthy women whose age is less than 30-35 years and who are not suffering from any illness or genetic disorders.

These young women, also called donors, are specially screened for the biggest enemies of AIDS and Hepatitis. The donor can be married or unmarried. However, married donors with children would be

preferable, primarily because they will have established their ability to bare children.

During egg donation the donor is given injections to produce many eggs. When these eggs are ripe, she is given a short anesthesia and the eggs are removed from inside the vagina without giving a cut on the abdomen. The donor can go home in three to four hours' time. The eggs are then fertilized with the recipient's husband's sperms in the laboratory and kept in the incubator for two days. In case the recipient's husband's sperm is of poor quality, the eggs can be fertilized by the technique of Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI). Two days later, a four-celled embryo is formed. Three days later, a eight-celled embryo is formed or five days later a multi-celled blastocyst is formed. This embryo (small baby) is then transferred back to the womb either at the four cell, eight cell or the blastocyst stage 30 to 40% of such women will become pregnant they can have a repeat egg donation cycle. Many women undergo two to four cycles and achieve their goal of a child. As easy as the method may sound to be the biggest problem faced by both doctors and patients is the availability and source of egg donors. Ideally, the best donor would be her own sister or near relative from her side (not from husband's blood relative). We have done such cases successfully in Lilavati Hospital.