

Acupuncture, herbs and old fashioned advice

BUSINESS BOOMING FOR CAPITAL'S VERY OWN BABYMAKERS

SANDRA DICK
Chief Writer

ADAM Broadbent is tightly wrapped up in his pram, a soft fleecy cap covering his few wisps of silky hair and his tiny fingers clenched into a tight fist. He's only six weeks old and, like any parent, his mum Sarah gazes lovingly on her newborn and marvels at what a little miracle he is. Nearby, baby Ethan Hirst, just five months old, is sleeping soundly too. His mum Jane is equally amazed by her firstborn's arrival. In the background, watching as a group of tiny tots sleep while

others toddle and play in the autumn sunshine, is the quartet of women without whose help none of these bouncing baby bundles of joy might even be here. For they are the fertility experts whose combination of natural therapies, herbal medicines and good old fashioned advice has led to a mini baby boom and to them being dubbed "Edinburgh's Baby-makers". Nearly half of the desperate would-be parents who have walked through the Edinburgh Natural Fertility Clinic's doors have ended up with a baby. Around 60 per cent of those

couples seeking help with secondary infertility issues – where they already have a child but struggle to conceive another – have gone on to have their longed-for second child. It's a remarkable success rate. While one in six couples are affected by infertility at some point in their lives, Edinburgh's NHS IVF success rate runs at around 37 per cent for women in their late 30s. "There is huge satisfaction whenever the phone rings and we find out one of our clients is pregnant," says Dee Armstrong, 42, conception coach at the clinic. "You get goosebumps every time, because we all know what it means to these couples."

Dee and colleagues Rachael Forrest, 42, Helen Gestwiki, 36 and Fiona Wolfenden, 43, work together using their individual expertise in Chinese medicine, acupuncture, massage, nutrition and fertility to help worried couples in their bid for a baby. They believe that in many cases a few simple changes in lifestyle, diet and natural treatments and

herbs can dramatically alter childless couples' chances. Certainly, they appear to be responsible for a mini baby boom. Dee reckons that in the last couple of years up to 50 of her clients have gone on to have a baby after taking her straightforward, no-nonsense advice – which can include the most basic of information. "It can come down to that fact that they're just doing it wrong," she says. "You'd be surprised how many women have no idea how to look for signs that they are ovulating and that's pretty important if you're trying to have a baby."

"Then it's about doing it properly – not too much, not too little and preferably at the right time." She points out to couples where they might be getting it wrong and can refer clients to colleagues like Rachael for acupuncture and abdominal massage to help regulate periods. Helen for guidance on nutrition and for Chinese herbs to help fertility, and Fiona, who also uses massage, acupuncture and Chinese herbs. The clinic was launched after the women spotted a rise in couples struggling to achieve their hopes for a baby and seeking help for unexplained infertility. Many, explains Dee, were desperate after discovering lengthy waiting lists for NHS IVF treatment – couples face a wait of around three years in Lothian. Some will certainly have found the natural route cheaper. While a cycle of IVF can cost some couples at least £3,500, the clinic offers treatment and consultations from £45. "I don't think there's such a thing as 'unexplained' infertility," Rachael insists. "Sometimes I feel couples are led to believe there's no alternative to their infertility other than IVF."

"But there are lots of reasons why people struggle – it could be age or it could be issues with sperm, diet, stress. "Sometimes people just need some basic help to get them eating healthily or understanding their bodies. Every case is different. "For some, acupuncture. Others might have psychological issues forming a barrier to pregnancy." Certainly, recent research has suggested acupuncture can dramatically improve a woman's chance of falling pregnant – and it can boost the prospects of a



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are tools of the trade for fertility experts offering alternative to IVF



FAMILY TREE: Edinburgh Natural Fertility Clinic staff Fiona Wolfenden, Dee Armstrong, Helen Gestwicki and Rachael Forrest with children they helped conceive - three-year-old Matthew Hicks and four-year-old Riley Hynd. Far left, Helen and Fiona with Ethan Hirst (five months), Nathalie Bullpitt (one year), Rosie Bruce (three weeks) and Tom Wood (14 months). Pictures: GREG MACVEAN

woman already undergoing IVF by as much as 65 per cent. For other clients, however, having a baby might rest in simply changing their eating habits.

Nutritionist Helen explains: "People are working hard, they forget to eat good meals or fill up on junk. None of that helps when you want to have a baby. Imbal-

ance in blood sugar can have an impact on hormones. "For us, it's brilliant when we get results. We see clients who are really struggling. Then to see them

get their wish is just fantastic!" ■ *The Edinburgh Natural Fertility Clinic, www.edinburghfertilityclinic.co.uk, 0131-315 2130. sdick@edinburghnews.com*

■ 'WHEN YOU WANT A BABY YOU'LL TRY ANYTHING'

THE heartache of an ectopic pregnancy was bad enough. But when Jane Hirst was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes just months later, it seemed as if her body was determined to ruin her dream of becoming a mum. "I was desperate to get pregnant again, and then I was told about the diabetes. "For some reason my periods became really random, maybe because I was struggling to eat properly because of the condition. And of course you can't get pregnant if all

that isn't working properly." She sought help from Napier's medical herbalist Dee Atkinson, who suggested she try Edinburgh Natural Fertility Clinic's acupuncture service. "I had acupuncture for around a year, which I'm sure helped regulate things. "They realised that my body temperatures were low and they used acupuncture to normalise it. My periods started to return to normal." When she finally fell pregnant with Ethan, now five

months, Jane and husband Graham could hardly believe her luck. "It was heartbreaking to go so long - nearly six years - trying for a baby and get nowhere. It was just incredibly exciting to discover I was finally pregnant," adds Jane, 34, of Colinton. "It is really hard to say for certain that the acupuncture made the difference, but I'm pretty sure it played a fairly big role. "When you want a baby you'll try anything."

■ 'KNOWING MORE ABOUT MY BODY HELPED'

SARAH Broadbent's pregnancy joy was short lived when, at just nine weeks, she lost her baby.

The miscarriage in January last year made her realise how desperate she was for a family. But while she was ready to try again five months on, her body didn't seem willing to comply.

"My cycle was all over the place," she recalls. "While the GP said that it would correct itself eventually, I wanted things sorted right away."

A family friend suggested acupuncture. Soon Sarah was visiting Edinburgh Natural Fertility Clinic practitioners Rachael for acupuncture and Fiona for Chinese herbs. "They got me looking at

what I was eating and taking my temperature and charting the results so I could be more aware of my body," recalls Sarah, 37, of Dalgety Bay.

"They also encouraged me to cut out caffeine and to eat breakfast, which I didn't really bother with before."

She had been following their advice for just four months when she discovered she was pregnant with baby Adam, now seven weeks old.

"I suppose some people might say it could have happened anyway without acupuncture."

"But I think that and just knowing more about how my body was working made a huge difference."