

PROOF

Couples with fertility problems often go to extreme lengths and spend thousands of pounds trying to become parents but new research shows that more than 50 per cent could solve their infertility by simply changing their diets. HELEN CARROLL reports

KAREN TUCKER and her husband Malcolm spent three years trying for a baby until tests revealed that Karen, 33, wasn't ovulating regularly. The couple were told they wouldn't conceive naturally and doctors recommended Karen took the drug Clomid to stimulate ovulation. Then last November, Karen and Malcolm, 35, who live in Clapham, South London, consulted nutritional therapist Penny Crowther to see if a change of diet could help. Ten months later, after a complete overhaul of what Karen ate, their daughter Lily was born on September 21.

A study of almost 400 infertile couples, carried out by the University of Surrey and the charity Foresight, revealed that the Tuckers' story is not unique. When the couples in the study followed special diets and avoided toxins, as well as being screened for gonito-urinary infections and high levels of heavy metals, 81 per cent of them conceived. As IVP treatment has only a 20 per cent success rate, these results are very impressive.

Scientists analysed nutrient levels in blood, hair, sweat and semen. Then individual diets and vitamin supplements were prescribed for each couple. Karen and Malcolm are

convinced Lily's arrival was the result of dietary changes. Karen, a former marketing director who is now a full-time mum, says: "When I look at Lily I can't believe she's ours."

"I went to see Penny after a friend recommended her and I was very sceptical at first but I was also desperate and willing to try anything." Penny, who practices at the Art of Health and Yoga Centre in South-west London, says: "In 1999 Karen suffered four months of gastro-intestinal upsets which were apparently cleared up with strong doses of antibiotics. The antibiotics upset the delicate balance of beneficial bacteria in the gut which, in turn, affected her lives."

Penny first put Karen on a wheat- and dairy-free diet to develop healthier bowel conditions. She also prescribed a probiotic containing the bifidobillus strain of bacteria, to rebalance her gut, and agnus castus for her hormones.

Karen also took a mineral formula high in zinc, as sexual function and reproductive capacity in both sexes are dependent on it.

On the couple's second visit to Penny last December, Karen said she felt better, little suspecting she was already pregnant. She had conceived just 25 days into the programme.

Penny says: "While the nutritional

approach doesn't always work, there are many who may never know their prayers for a child could be answered with dietary changes."

Couples most likely to benefit from nutritional changes are the 30 per cent with unexplained infertility and the 27 per cent of women not ovulating properly, like Karen.

Air hostess Annabelle Wood, 35, and her husband Andrew, 42, director of a software company, tried for a baby for four years. They too, conceived after changing their diet. Their daughter Fernanda is now 13 months old. "When I was 26 I discovered I had polycystic ovary syndrome, which interferes with

ovulation and can cause infertility," says Annabelle, from Wandsworth, South-west London.

"So in 1995 when I married Andrew, who has a son from a previous marriage, we knew we might not be able to have children."

In March 1999, still experiencing irregular periods and losing faith in conventional medicine, Annabelle consulted Penny. She was first recommended a three-month detox, eradicating dairy, wheat, sugar and caffeine from her diet and adding supplements of isoflavones and agnus castus, which both help to balance hormones. She also took a multivitamin high in zinc and

manganese, fish oil capsules and flaxseed oil for the omega-3 essential fatty acid.

To balance Annabelle's blood sugar, Penny prescribed liquid chromium and glutamine supplements and a probiotic which contained "friendly" bacteria for her gut. "For eight months I stuck to the diet — and it was tough," says Annabelle.

SHE survived mainly on fish, brown rice and vegetables. She also had to sacrifice most of her favourite foods, though one incidental benefit was that she lost a stone.

"Last November, I went back to see my gynaecologist, told him about the changes and he organised blood tests," she says. "I was due to get the results on January 4 but by then I knew I was pregnant. I'm convinced without the help of a nutritionist I would not have given birth to our daughter."

● Penny Crowther is on 020 8747 3882. For a list of qualified UK nutritional therapists call RANT (British Association of Nutrition Therapists) on 0870 666 1284.

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HAPPY FAMILY: The Woods with Fernanda