

# Test puts baby timing on ice

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Hundreds of women are paying for new "egg-timer" fertility tests, with experts forecasting increasing numbers will freeze their eggs.

The blood tests, which show the number of child-bearing years left, and available in the North Island since the end of last year, recently became available in Christchurch.

Previously, women had to pay for a less accurate and more costly ultrasound scan to determine fertility.

Since their introduction, hundreds of women each month have paid about \$400 for the test and follow-up consultation.

Experts say the tests will see a consequent rise in the freezing of eggs, despite it still being illegal to thaw them.

The Health Minister is considering a recommendation by the Advisory Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology, which guides the Government on fertility issues, that the use of frozen eggs be allowed for some individuals.

The new egg tests had attracted "a lot of interest from single women", said Michelle Collyer, chief executive of support group Fertility New Zealand.

Collyer said one in four New Zealanders now had infertility issues. This had climbed from about one in five several years ago. The egg-timer tests allowed single women and couples to make informed decisions about when and how to have children, she said.

Many women in their 30s who called Fertility New Zealand about the tests said they were likely to consider freezing their eggs if they found they had a limited time to conceive.

A lot of single women had not met "Mr Right" yet and wanted to know how long they had before they were unable to conceive or could do so only with great difficulty.

"We are dealing with a lot of

social infertility now rather than biological infertility," Collyer said. "That means people are often putting their career before embarking on a family."

"The egg test gives people more information about what their options are and, as far as I'm concerned, the more information the better."

Obstetrician and gynaecologist Andrew Murray, the medical director of Fertility Associates in Wellington, said its "egg-check" tests provided important information for single women and couples in deciding when to start a family.

Having the test, and freezing eggs, were a kind of "fertility insurance", he said.

Few people had eggs frozen at Fertility Associates, and they were predominantly cancer patients.

However, it was likely that if the thawing of eggs was allowed and the related technology became more sophisticated, more women might do it, Murray said.

Currently, a frozen embryo was far more likely to be successfully thawed than a frozen egg, he said.

It cost about \$10,000 to freeze either an egg or an embryo, Murray said.

The cost of being inseminated with donor sperm was about \$1000.

Repromed deputy medical director Dr Greg Phillipson said its egg-timer tests assessed levels of the hormone AMH, which related to a woman's egg supply.

Women produced a finite number of eggs at birth.

Phillipson said the egg-timer test would compare a woman with 100 others of the same age to give a percentage ranking.

If, for example, a woman scored 10 per cent, it was likely she had a limited window of opportunity to conceive, he said.

It was likely that if the moratorium on thawing eggs was lifted, more single women with limited fertility would freeze eggs for when they met their life partner, Phillipson said.



Timely help: Caron Gutovitz, with husband Scott and son Owen, 2½, has started IVF treatment after a test found she was less likely to conceive.

Photo: FAIRFAX

## Family matters back on fertility track

At 31, Caron Gutovitz believed she had years left to conceive a child.

However, after a new blood test that determines how many eggs a woman has left, Gutovitz has found she is nearing the end of her fertility.

The egg-timer or egg-check blood test was recently

introduced to New Zealand.

Since then, hundreds of women have had it.

Gutovitz had her son, Owen, about two years ago, and had been trying to conceive for the past year.

Eventually, she turned to fertility experts, who discovered scarring on her uterus.

This had been removed, but she was still unable to get pregnant.

"I had the egg-check tests and it showed that my fertility was very low," she said. "It showed my ovaries thought I was far older than I am."

"My body thought I was 40-something instead of 31. The

result was pretty unexpected because I wouldn't have thought I had that problem."

The egg-check test is done via a blood test.

Results take about 10 days and are plotted on a graph against a person's age.

Gutovitz said the test results had "radically" changed her

outlook on getting pregnant.

She is now starting in vitro fertilisation treatment.

"If I hadn't done the test, I would have continued to try and get pregnant through less invasive techniques. This way I know what my options are and I'm not going to find myself running out of time."