

True love: Bold, brave and a baby

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A LOVING couple are planning to get by with a little help from their friends in a bold bid to have a baby.

For 18 months, they have been trying to turn two into three, but without success.

So it is perhaps apt that a song called 'With a Little Help from My Friends', released on the Beatles album Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, could inspire them.

Frances Micklem and Jani Iloven from Castlewarren, Kilkenny have been together for over two years and would love a baby.

Both wanted to explore all options before committing to assisted reproduction techniques like IVF (In Vitro Fertilisation). So, with the support of family and friends, they will now follow what is called the pre-Conceive programme which will see both take a specially-designed nutritional supplement daily and follow a healthy lifestyle.

TV stars

And their quest for life will see them become television stars as their journey is being followed by TV3's Ireland AM as part of a fortnightly slot which lifts the lid on fertility in Ireland. Twelve other couples are already over half way through Europe's first ever clinical study into the use of pre-Conceive on male and female fertility.

Wexford-based nutritional supplement experts, Pillar Healthcare, developed pre-Conceive and are working with fertility specialists, ReproMed Ireland, on the study which examines sub-fertility, using advanced tests, while taking the most active nutritional supplement for improving fertility.

Pre-study testing of the first dozen couples shows chronic deficiencies in Vitamin D3 and antioxidant levels as well as poor diet, high sugar and stress levels and a lack of understanding about good nutrition.

"We're very hopeful," 43 year-old energy healer Frances," told *The Reporter*. We've been trying to conceive for over 18 months. It's just not happening so we know we need help.

A viable option

"I am a bit late in starting to try to conceive. I have less eggs to play with and a possible deterioration in quality too. I wasn't ready to get pregnant up to now.

"We have met the team in Pillar Healthcare who are dedicated and professional. The pre-Conceive idea was developed by this Irish company and I was excited to hear that it is a viable option. I have been through the initial tests with ReproMed, who tell me, based on my preliminary test results, that I have a good chance of conceiving.

"They believe that we have a healthy lifestyle and the product is so therapeutic that it can strengthen our reproductive systems," Frances said.

Frances already has a healthy



Frances and Jani, planning a baby: Warm and wonderful

diet and says she's been advised by nutritionists that she needs to lose about a pound a week and eat more protein.

She doesn't smoke and only drinks socially so following a healthier lifestyle isn't a massive challenge.

Niggling fear

This has been a great journey of self-discovery and understanding. The journey is only beginning. My only niggling fear is that I could have a baby that is not well and it might be

blamed on my decision to have a baby late. But it's a chance we're willing to take.

"We plan to take pre-Conceive for a minimum of three months and really eliminate coffee, alcohol and take great levels of exercise and romancing.

"It has been stressful to consider that my body is not perfect for conceiving or carrying a baby.

"But I'm delighted to have a chance to consciously and proactively prepare myself," Frances continued.

Jani, aged 37, originally from Finland, is a qualified and gifted chef. He works with Frances at Harmony Hall, Castlewarren.

Healthy lifestyle

He has also been advised to lose a little weight and boost his protein intake. Jani also has a healthy diet and lifestyle.

"This is a journey we will take together. I have an open mind and I am looking forward to see how this unfolds. I have no fears. Everything has been explained to us and we are looking

forward to the challenge.

Up to 30 Irish couples who are not part of the study but took the supplement and followed a healthier lifestyle have already gone on to conceive, *The Reporter* has been told.

Pillar's Matt Ronan developed pre-Conceive with his business partner, Mark Whitney, and says the clinical study will prove just how effective pre-Conceive is in boosting both male and female fertility. He has high hopes for Frances and Jani.

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Good health: To the three of us

"Frances and Jani are beginning a very exciting journey and we will be with them every step of the way.

Growing concern

"This is becoming a growing concern in the western world, including Ireland. At the moment, there are a lack of options for couples struggling to conceive and we hope to put pre-Conceive forward as the viable alternative," said Matt.

"Nutrition plays a key role in all aspects of our health. Fertility is no different. The 12 couples already taking part in the study were selected by ReproMed, as were Frances and Jani.

"The entire process is delivered through Declan Keane and his team at ReproMed, making sure that the study is totally impartial and backs up what we have already achieved with as many as 30 other couples who took the supplements and shared their good news with us.

"There may be many more we've not heard back from," Matt Ronan added. "Over the 90 day trial, each couple has been taking one daily serving of pre-Conceive, while following a healthy lifestyle regime, outlined by Pillar. The study is a first for Europe and breaking new ground," Mark Whitney explained.

Chronic deficiencies

"Pre-study testing of the couples showed nutritional intake to be an issue. Nutritional blood tests have shown chronic deficiencies in Vitamin D3 and antioxidant levels which are part of our defence and protection mechanisms.

"Oestrogen and progesterone, which are heavily involved in developing and maturing an egg, are in disarray. A balanced set of hormones are necessary for optimal fertility levels in women. Semen analysis, which examines the quality and quantity of sperm cells, has shown a low count and poor motility. This means that there are too few sperm cells, with the majority of them not swimming well.

"The nutritional consultation showed several deficiencies in nutrient intake from our food like Vitamin D3, Folic Acid, Co-Q-10 and B12 and a general lack of understanding about good nutrition.

High caffeine intake

"A high caffeine intake and sugary snacks were noted as a concerning trend. It would seem, in our sample at least, proper nutrition and eating nutritious meals have been replaced for nutritionally void, convenient foods.

"Lifestyle issues were also noted, including high stress levels and a lack of exercise in both men and women. Work related stress and financial pressure were noted in several consultations. The preliminary testing and nutritional consultations have shown some interesting results. Poor dietary intake, a sedentary and stress filled lifestyle is a recipe for decreased fertility in men and women," he concluded.