

Billings Ovulation Method® and the Achievement of Pregnancy.

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This study to investigate whether the Billings Ovulation Method® is efficacious in assisting couples to achieve pregnancy was conducted by Research Team of Ovulation Method Research and Reference Centre of Australia Ltd. It included all couples aiming to achieve a pregnancy who enrolled at any one of 17 Australian Billings Ovulation Method® clinics within the required time frame - 1/1/1999 – 31/12/2003. All couples were included regardless of age, cycle length, or pre-diagnosed sub-fertile indicators of either partner.

Background to Study

The members of the Research Committee of the Ovulation Method Research and Reference Centre of Australia decided in 2003 that a retrospective Australian Study should be undertaken to investigate the anecdotal evidence of the positive outcomes in assisting couples to achieve pregnancy and to document the findings. Members of the Committee at that time were Drs John and Evelyn Billings, Dr Joseph Santamaria, Professor James B Brown and Marie Marshall. Marie Marshall was asked to be the Study Leader and a Research Team was formed from a small group of Melbourne based senior teachers.

A data base was developed by Katie Olivier and Timothy Nolan using the Billings Ovulation Method® clinical history card as the basis for data collection. The data base was designed to include details of clinic attendance or contact with an accredited Billings Ovulation Method® teacher, ages, reproductive history, how long trying to achieve pregnancy, previous pregnancy and live births, pre-diagnosed medical conditions affecting fertility of either of the couple as well as any fertility treatment undergone. Previous contraceptive use would also be documented, including age of first use, length of use and how long ceased. From the copy of the woman's chart, her cycle length, mucus patterns, Peak Symptom, luteal phase inadequacies and understanding and use of the Guidelines of the Method for achieving pregnancy would also be apparent.

Senior teachers of the Education Committee in Melbourne would be asked to provide de-identified history cards as well as a copy of personal charts, recorded in symbols, of all consecutive couples aiming to achieve pregnancy during the period 1/1/1999 to 31/12/2003, with each individual couple followed for a maximum period of 24 months.

In order to maintain confidentiality, all contact with women was to be by mail, forwarded by the individual Senior Teachers. A questionnaire, with appropriate covering letter was devised to be returned directly to

the Study Group in Melbourne detailing the outcome of their use of the Billings Ovulation Method® to achieve a pregnancy.

The Research Committee approved the quality of the data base and the study protocol, and a decision was taken to conduct a Pilot Study of 50 couples to test the quality of the Study.

The Pilot Study included 31 couples classified as infertile, and revealed a total of 25 pregnancies were achieved, including 11 of 31 infertile couples. Of these 11 couples, there were 2 miscarriages, 8 live births with 1 woman still pregnant.

The data collected reflected the anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of the Method and the Research Committee approved an Australia wide Study of 17 clinics to determine this was not just a Melbourne based result: this Australia-wide study would provide an audit of the quality and excellence of teachers in all parts of Australia as well as provide a larger base of women for data evaluation to determine the success or otherwise of pregnancy achievement.

Participants were classified into groups according to duration of unintended infertility: normal fertility (<12 months), sub-fertile (12-24 months) and infertile (>24 months.) The statistical analysis was undertaken by Dr David Nolan. An enormous quantity of data became available from the 449 participants enrolled in the Study and statistical analysis results of particular aspects obtained from this study have been separately published. Overall results are included below.

Results of a retrospective study of couples who attended Billings Ovulation Method® clinics between 1999 and 2003 wishing to achieve pregnancy

240 couples achieved pregnancy of 384 participants - a total of 63%.

Of these pregnancies, 169/240 (70%) resulted in live births with 14 still pregnant at end of the Study.

Known miscarriages totalled 33/240 (14%) whilst the pregnancy outcome is unknown for 24.

Sixty percent of 384 couples had previously been childless and only 18% had prior knowledge of the signs of fertility.

The average length of time all 384 participants had been trying to achieve pregnancy was 15 months, and the average time from initial instruction in the Billings Ovulation Method® to conception was 4.7 months.

207 couples were previously classified as sub-fertile (trying to achieve for more than 12 months) and, of 20 couples who had previously been unsuccessful with IVF/ART, 7 achieved pregnancy using the Billings Ovulation Method®.

Of those over 38 years of age, about half achieved pregnancy.

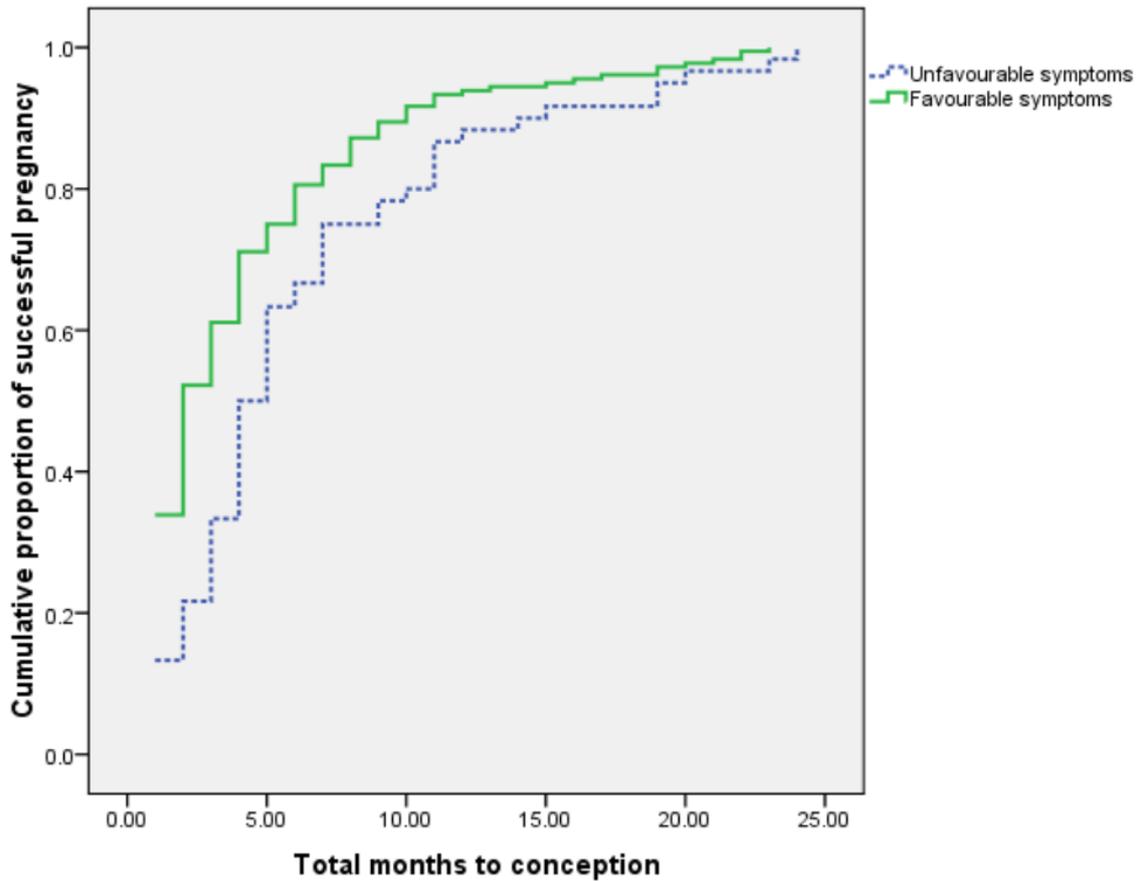


Figure 1. Kaplan-Meier survival analysis of time to conception among subjects with a successful pregnancy outcome (n=240). Adjusting for the significant effect of the presence or absence of favourable mucus symptoms ($P=0.003$), no independent effect of fertility group or female age group was identified (both $P>0.2$).

A paper based on the data obtained was published online on 29th October, 2019 in *Human Fertility: Stratification of fertility potential according to cervical mucus symptoms: achieving pregnancy in fertile and infertile couples*. Marie Marshall, Marian Corkill, Mark Whitty, Adrian Thomas & Joseph Turner

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