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Pregnancy hopes weigh heavy on obese women



Weight loss surgery may help women have safer pregnancies and deliver healthier babies and with ever growing evidence today to show that surgeries can increase fertility.

Obesity is a known risk factor for ovulation problems, and with 60 per cent of women in the UAE classed as overweight or obese, its impact on women's fertility is not emphasised enough, according to an expert.

“Obesity has a significant impact on reproduction, however, we know that weight loss surgery can significantly improve women's chances of (getting) ... pregnant,” Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgeon for The American Surgecenter in Abu Dhabi, Dr Patrick Noel, told Khaleej Times.

While obesity and its links to diabetes, heart disease and chronic health complications are often highlighted, obesity and its links to infertility are little talked about in the UAE and Dr Noel is keen to open up the discussion here.

Since moving to the UAE six months ago, Dr Noel has performed weight loss surgery on three women with fertility problems. “My experience here is only short but it is important for these women to know that there can be a solution to their problem.” Obese women often experience problems with hormonal imbalances and ovulation, and as a result, they are three times more likely to suffer infertility than women with a normal body mass index.

Weight loss surgery may help women have safer pregnancies and deliver healthier babies and with ever growing evidence today to show that surgeries can increase fertility, Dr Noel explained the benefits of such surgery.

“Bariatric surgery has been shown to improve menstrual cyclicity in an ovulatory woman. The increased risk of miscarriage in obese women may also decline after bariatric surgery too.” With more than 80 per cent of bariatric procedures performed in women, approximately half of these

are performed in reproductive aged women. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity figures are estimated to reach 700 million by the end of this year, with rates in the UAE double the world average.

A study carried out by the Amsterdam Academic Medical Centre in the Netherlands concluded that 43 per cent of severely obese women were less likely to achieve pregnancy than normal-weight, or overweight women.

With a strong association between obesity and infertility, Dr Noel referred to a study carried out by the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery.

The study reviewed the fertility outcomes after intragastric balloon placement, adjustable gastric banding, sleeve gastrectomy and gastric bypass in childbearing women with a diagnosis of infertility.

“Of the 110 obese infertile women who had tried unsuccessfully to become pregnant before weight loss, 69 became pregnant afterward. That’s 62 per cent, with all pregnancies proceeding forward without complications,” he said.

But when asked if natural weight loss would achieve the same results, Dr Noel said it was difficult to answer. “I can’t really say, but we do know that weight loss surgery often leads to an easier path when trying to get pregnant.”

However, he did emphasise the importance of regular check-ups following weight loss surgery. “It is suggested that women after bariatric surgery who become pregnant need to be followed up by a group of specialists including a nutritionist, an educated nursing staff, an obstetrician, an endocrinologist, an internal medicine specialist, and a bariatric surgeon.”