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NEW ORLEANS METROPOLITAN AREA

JAN 24 1985

# Woman seeks help for infertility problem

**Dear Dr. Mendelsohn:** I have been "infertile" ever since the birth of our daughter eight years ago. I am now 32. In 1974, I had two miscarriages within six months of each other, both at six weeks along in the pregnancy. I had no trouble with my pregnancy with Amy. She was and is extremely healthy. I breastfed her exclusively for four months, and I continued to nurse her until she was a year old.

Since then, there has not been a sign of pregnancy. Moderate to severe cramping has always accompanied my menstrual periods, and having a baby did not eliminate that pain. I have had all the usual infertility tests, and my husband has had two semen analyses. Everything has checked out fine. I have used temperature charts to determine my ovulation time.

My gynecologist suggests I might have endometriosis, and he either wants to do a laparoscopy, cauterize the lesions, or use hormonal therapy. I am very leery of all these procedures. I have tried chiropractic adjustments, herbs and vitamins, but I'm also dis-

## The People's Doctor

*Dr. Robert Mendelsohn*

trustful of nutritionists who differ so widely in their ideas.

Could my infertility be hereditary? My mother and sister have had similar problems, but my grandmothers and other ancestors were prolific.

I took the Pill for six months when I first got married, but I had so many problems with severe cramping that I haven't used any kind of birth control since then. My mother never used DES.

Could you please excuse my longwindedness and help me?

N.P.

**Dear Mrs. N.P.:** Although your letter may seem long to you, it accurately reflects the long road traveled by many women (of the 25 percent of all U.S. couples who are infertile) in their efforts to bear children.

As you already have discovered, the various modern

methods of infertility management leave much to be desired. Studies comparing infertile couples who have received drug and surgical treatments versus those who have not show little difference in outcome. Indeed, the risks of the drugs/surgery approach to infertility management means that a woman must place her life on the line in an effort to have a child. Controlled studies in other healing arts (chiropractic, nutrition, herbology, etc.) are non-existent.

Doctors are unable to come up with scientifically proven methods of reversing infertility but they have certainly played a major role in creating infertility (DES, the Pill, antihypertensive drugs, Inderal, Tagamet, etc.) Nevertheless, reasons for infertility cannot be attributed exclusively to modern medicine. After all, in the Book of Genesis, Sarah was infertile long before the days of DES. So were Rachel and later Hannah. In many respects, the Bible represents an ongoing account of attempts to overcome barrenness, ranging from love potions to appeals for divine

intervention to supplying one's husband with concubines (e.g. Bilhah and Zilpah).

Throughout the centuries, Jews have developed elaborate traditions to promote fertility. These include the timing of intercourse to coincide with ovulation, abstinence from sexual relations during the menses and for a week thereafter, and — even though it's too late to apply in your case — Jewish law (in contrast to American law) mandates priority to a wedding party over a funeral procession if the two should meet at an intersection.

Since the healing arts of today have not been successful in overcoming your sterility, perhaps your own religion can provide additional historically-based options for you to explore.

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*The People's Doctor* appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday in the Living section. Dr. Mendelsohn welcomes questions from readers. While he cannot reply to them all individually, he will answer those of general interest in his column. Write to *The People's Doctor*, P.O. Box 982, Evanston, Ill. 60204.

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