## Kite clinic The Independent



## Why a smile is more use to a girl than a fertility kit

You want a baby. You haven't got a man. Time is running out. Do you really need reminding how dire the outlook is?



All in the mind: like many women, Rachel in 'Cold Feet' conceived after be

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n the face of it the new "Plan Ahead" fertility test kit is a magnificent advance for womankind. For £180 any female can take a blood test that will show how many eggs she has left, and whether this is within the normal range for her age. This kit appears to be particularly good news for women on the further shores of the prime childbearing years (say, 30-35), and in stable relationships where children are definitely on the cards. They can delay motherhood to pursue professional goals without having to play such a frightening game of Russian roulette with their fertility.

Having said that, as any medical expert will tell you, reproduction is far more complex than just being the proud owner of a hamper full of eggs. Your ovaries may be brimming with beauties while your fallopian tubes and uterus harbour a world of trouble. Alternatively, your old man's jism may make sea slugs look lively and cod stocks look plentiful. Or you might just be one of the thousands of couples who seek fertility treatment every year and whose inability to conceive yields no explanation from science - eggs and sperm fine, but the little sods refuse to make an omelette.

In any case, let's not waste too much time fretting over the hitched females. The women most likely to be queuing for the Plan Ahead kit are those whose

advanced planning list consists of one bullet point: "Find man to have baby with". Women in the vicinity of 36-43 who are single or in dead-end relationships, want kids, and only need one more bit of bad news before they stick their head in the gas oven. Obviously the simple bit of advice is: if you can't take the stress, don't take the test. Yeah, right. Because if women were like that they'd listen when someone says, "Hey, Eve, don't eat that apple!" And if the test yields bleak news? The woman will feel desperate and men will see the baby-hunger in her eyes raging like the blood-lust of a she-wolf.

## Men will see the baby hunger raging in her eyes

Despair in itself will further reduce a woman's chance of conception. Since the beginning of the 20th century the links between the mind and the endocrine system have been extensively documented and there's plenty of evidence to show how this interplay affects fertility. One compelling example is related by leading psychoanalyst Darian Leader, co-author of the riveting Why Do People Get Ill? Exploring the Mind/Body Connection, which is due to be published later this year. Apparently a surprising number of women who have experienced seemingly immutable fertility problems will suddenly

fall pregnant after being accepted as an adoptive parent (Cold Feet fans may remember that just such a pregnancy formed part of the plot-line for Rachel in the final series). Leader explains that women who felt unconsciously prohibited from stepping into the place of the mother may experience a "symbolic sanction" on motherhood when the adoption request is accepted. In other words, it's often about the mindset.

So it seems to me that what single women in thrall to their biological clock don't need is a test that offers the possibility of brutal disappointment. They need the panacea called optimism. Which brings me to another much talked-about topic of the week: complementary therapies. A new BBC2 series, Alternative Medicine, kicked off on Tuesday with a look at acupuncture. Amusingly, not to say patronisingly, they devised clinical tests to see if it worked and found that, well, yes, but the Western medics couldn't explain why. I say "amusingly" because to the Chinese that's rather like saying you've devised an experiment to see if the wheel might facilitate locomotion. Any acupuncturist can explain exactly why it works, but Western science isn't equipped to accept the explanation.

As I'm sure you realise, I write with the fervour of the converted. You may well read this with the sneer of the hardened sceptic. If so, you are probably thinking that the needles only work because credible half-

wits like myself are so bleedin' susceptible. One acquaintance of mine who visits my god of an acupuncturist, Gerad Kite, once said to me, "Oh, I don't listen to any of that five elements, paths of energy mumbo jumbo." "So why do you go?" I asked. "Oh, Gerad got me pregnant," she said, not meaning Rohypnol and a turkey baster.

Acupuncture can have dramatic effects on a woman's fertility. But, no, you won't see convincing research in The Lancet because it's impossible to introduce proper controls. Every consultation and diagnosis is different. Some of the women will use acupuncture alongside IVF. With others the aim will be preventing early miscarriage. I know nine women (aged 35-43) who consulted Kite as part of their efforts to conceive after difficulties and only one faced disappointment - but she stopped going after a couple of appointments.

What I tend to tell friends is that it puts you in a better emotional place and that helps you conceive. There's no need to subscribe to the whole body ley-line Eastern mysticism thing. Oldfashioned British cynics can merely tell themselves acupuncture helps send a memo to self that goes: "Pull yourself together, Jones." Either way we're talking positive energy, man.