



Patients ordered to slim down before treatment

No IVF for obese women: hospital

By health writer CLAIR WEAVER

OBESE women are being barred from expensive fertility treatment programs at Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred hospital until they lose weight.

The hospital has told clinically obese women they are too much of a risk to themselves and their unconceived babies to justify the costly IVF treatment.

Other Sydney IVF specialists are also refusing to treat overweight patients as they are less likely to fall pregnant on IVF and suffer a higher rate of complications such as miscarriage, diabetes and deep vein thrombosis.

The decision affects women whose body mass indexes (BMI) are in the high-30s.

This is equivalent to a woman of average 165cm height weighing more than 100kg.

Dr Mark Bowman, head of reproductive endocrinology and infertility at RPA and medical director at Sydney IVF, said women with a BMI of more than 30 were less likely to fall pregnant.

"The exclusion criteria in our hospital's public IVF program is over the age of 45 or a BMI in the upper-30s to 40 or more," he said.

"We send them away and say come back when your BMI is reduced.

"They don't need to lose a lot of weight — sometimes losing five to 10 kilos, even if you are 100kg, is enough."

The use of BMI as a tool to measure

body weight has been controversial because it does not take into account body shape and muscle mass.

This has resulted in professional athletes recording overweight or obese readings.

Only last month the British Fertility Society recommended that severely obese women should be barred from government-funded IVF treatment.

Sydneysider Danielle De Carlo, 26, who lost 70kg after having lap-band surgery, said she wanted to lose weight to ensure she could have children in the future.

Ms De Carlo, who had surgery three years ago at the Sydney Institute of Obesity Surgery, said: "I love kids and I was frightened I wouldn't be able to have any because it would affect my fertility.

"I really think there should be a limit on the weight to do IVF because you can't do the things you should be able to do with your kids if you are too big."

Obese women often seek IVF because they have more problems conceiving naturally. They have higher rates of polycystic ovarian syndrome, which can cause weight gain, and face extra risks with collecting their eggs.





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Difference: Danielle De Carlo after she lost 70kg and before surgery *Picture: Dean Marzolla*

