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Research showing that a man's age can affect the outcome of pregnancy highlights...
loc that a conference in Paris that such couples should be offered ICSI (intracytoplasmic sperm injection — where a sperm is injected directly into an egg).

Dr Edgar Mocanu of HARI, the infertility clinic attached to the Rotunda Hospital, sees an increasing number of males coming forward for ICSI.

"What was perceived as a female problem is now recognised more as a couple issue," says Dr Walsh. "And thus the investigation and treatment of the male has now a recognised place in the practice of infertility." Dr David Walsh of the SIMS fertility clinic, while always aware that infertility is a 'couple' issue, is surprised by the degree of the problem as highlighted by the research. "We knew that age matters, and that under 35 is a better time to have a baby, but with men, the talk was always of the risks for much older men — those in their 50s and 60s."

"There was, for example, an increased risk of achondroplasia (dwarfism), in their children. We now see that in men beyond 35 there is an increase in quite a lot of abnormalities — in things like autism, schizophrenia and cleft lip. The rate of change in the female is higher than in the male, but the difference is just in the magnitude. The same changes do happen to men.

"The research is, ultimately useful," he says, "It gives out a good message. The couple need to address infertility as a shared problem. And that is good. It brings you closer to a shared solution."

Zita West, pictured left, who runs a fertility and preconception clinic in London, is not surprised by the research. "When I first started out I just saw women, now I see couples," she says. "Men have 50% of the genetic material. Up to a year ago they only made lifestyle changes if they had a poor sperm count. Research like this shows that men are just as involved in the reproduction process as women. ICSI only takes one sperm, but the quality of that sperm is really important.

"Men are becoming far more accepting. Especially when they have had a couple of failed ICSI's. They say: 'I don't want to go through all that again. I want to do everything I can to improve my sperm.'"

"With IVF the whole focus is on getting pregnant," says West. "I am trying to educate couples that what you are looking for is the healthiest egg and sperm, and there is a lot that men can do to improve their sperm.

"It is, though, all down to luck and genetics," she warns. "The quality of sperm can improve enormously for some men when they change their lifestyles, others make the changes and there is no difference." Sarah Leather, a naturopath specialising in fertility, says men tend not to take the issue seriously enough. "Some men refuse to come to my clinic, especially if their sperm analysis test is normal. But this needs to be maintained, and they could be doing things this weekend that inhabit their sperm in three or four months time, when they are trying for a baby. Sperm quality changes all the time.

"Men in their 30s are under a lot of stress. They feel they have to achieve a lot, and if they don't have children they tend to party. They do not see the need to change their lifestyle, and they will go out and drink 10 to 15 pints every Friday and Saturday night. They should decrease to seven drinks over..."
How Infertility is a Shared Issue, Writes Sue Leonard

Health Boost: Sperm to Ways To

1. Quit smoking. If you can't do

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Two

Get a good all round supplement

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