

NI Life & Style

with NIAMH McENEANEY

HEALTH & BEAUTY SPECIAL

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We must Examen male fertility



Medical experts testing samples in Examen lab



Fast-track testing service for men launched by Belfast firm as NHS waiting lists lengthen

As most of you are aware, today is Father's Day. The day the dads in our lives get spoilt with presents and cards and treated to days out and family experiences for 24 hours as we convey just how much they mean to us.

All in all, a very happy day. However, it can also be a very unhappy day for many, particularly those who want nothing more in this world than to be a dad – but can't.

Just like how Mother's Day can be a trigger for any women out there who are struggling to conceive, it can be just as tough for men.

Even more so as most of the time, the focus is on the female side of infertility.

That definitely should not be the case as statistics show it is something which affects one in every six couples trying to conceive. And in at least half of all cases of infertility, a male factor is a major or contributing cause.

There are lots of options available to women who are looking to find the root of their infertility struggle – GPs, gynaecologists fertility experts. However, for men, the options are a bit more limited.

The one test they need to do can only be carried out at their local NHS fertility clinic.

And even after they get past the huge waiting lists – made even worse by the Covid-19 pandemic – the test that is carried out is quite basic. It can determine the sperm's mobility and quantity but what it can't identify

is the quality. This can only be done in one way – in a test which was created by Queen's University Belfast Professor Sheena Lewis.

She has dedicated her career to researching male fertility tests powered by SpermComet technology, with her goal being to identify causes and treatments and she has done this by developing novel biomarkers.

Prof Lewis' research has led to the formation of a university spin-out company – Examenlab Ltd – marketing its Exact range of male fertility tests powered by SpermComet technology. She has researched in the Russell group University; Queens University Belfast for 25 years to develop this accurate test to diagnose male infertility.

Prof Lewis said: "DNA is what makes us who we are. And the DNA of sperm is its most important feature – it makes a man's child look and act like him."

"Your sperm DNA carries a copy of the genes that you pass on to your baby so not only do your genes pass on your characteristics – like eye colour or height – but they build our brains, determine our behaviour and our future health."

"Sperm DNA can be damaged when sperm are being made; snapping some of the strands."

"Men with high levels of damaged sperm DNA are less likely to get their partner pregnant and have double the risk of miscarriage."

"Even if your sperm count is normal, the

sperm may not be of good quality." And Prof Lewis told how important it is to have all the information before deciding on which course of infertility treatment to embark upon.

She said: "Fertility treatment can be emotionally draining, time consuming and expensive."

"If you are starting a cycle of treatment, it is vital you give yourself the best possible chance of making that cycle of treatment count. With every cycle comes the possibility of getting pregnant and having a baby, it is therefore important men understand their levels of sperm DNA damage."

"The quality of your sperm DNA will help fertility experts predict the fertility treatment

with the highest likelihood of success for you, which means you could improve your chances of getting pregnant with fewer treatment cycles. The power to improve the quality of your sperm DNA is literally in your hands."

And with one in four pregnancies ending in miscarriage, it's sadly a relatively common problem many couples have to face so determining your sperm DNA could help avoid such emotionally-charged losses.

Prof Lewis said: "Exact testing provides information on the amount of DNA damage in your sperm, which may provide an explanation as to the reason behind your miscarriage."

"If it is sperm DNA damage that's a problem, there are a number of lifestyle changes that can be undertaken to improve your sperm quality and increase your chances of a successful pregnancy in

the future.

"The test can not only help provide necessary understanding, but also help fertility professionals make clinical decisions in regard to which treatment is right for you."

Visit www.examenlab.com for more info.



Examen lab in Weavers Court, Belfast, above, Prof Sheena Lewis



Local case study

My wife and I have been trying for a baby for two and a half years.

It would be our second child and therefore, before we started trying, we were very confident conceiving again wouldn't be a problem.

We were wrong.

Our son was very much a surprise. We had just got married and moved into our dream home. Of course, we were going to start thinking about starting a family soon, but our boy had other ideas.

When we got over the initial shock, we were delighted and couldn't wait to become parents.

My wife had a very straightforward pregnancy (apart from the odd bout of heartburn) and the birth was very much routine too.

So there was no indication that there would be any physical problems with giving our little boy a sibling when we both felt ready.

Three years later, that time had come and we started trying.

My wife bought all the right vitamins, ovulation kits and she showed all the right signs that everything was normal.

Despite the fact that it takes the average healthy couple up to a year to conceive, we were starting to worry and wonder why it wasn't happening.

Of course, that worry and stress didn't help and it continued to get worse as the months rolled on.

My wife was particularly tense as she worried about the age gap between our son and a potential brother or sister getting bigger and bigger.

So we took matters into our own hands and contacted our GP. After all the tests and scans on my wife came back normal, we were referred to the Belfast Fertility Clinic. But we were told it would be at least a year before we were seen.

And then, another six months at least after that until we could embark on IVF, if that's what we decided to do.

These waiting times were the same for me and my test too.

So we decided to cut the length of waiting time as much as possible and that's when we came across Examen.

We realised we could at least get my

side of things sorted while we waited for the BFC to get in touch.

And after doing our research, we also discovered the BFC only does a routine semen analysis, whereas Examen delves further to determine your sperm DNA quality.

So in order to put our minds at ease, we went for it.

We were impressed with the service from the very beginning.

After our initial contact, we spoke to a professional about our situation and what we needed. They explained the service and what it would entail if we decided to go ahead.

We opted for the Semen Analysis and Exact test, which uncovers any DNA fragmentation.

A couple of days later, a discreet little box came through our letter box.

It contained a collection kit, a simple form and instructions.

We emailed Examen to book in for a sample drop-off slot and there were plenty of days and times available, making it very easy to work around our busy schedules. And the day of drop-off was simple and stress-free.

The sample has to be handed into the Examen lab in Weavers Business Park in Belfast within an hour of being produced, giving you plenty of time to get there.

There was ample parking and I just had to go to the door of the lab where I was greeted by an assistant who took my sample and told me I would have my results within seven to 10 days.

Which I did. Thankfully all was completely normal and I got a detailed analysis of my sperm and reassurance that it was perfectly capable of helping to reproduce a healthy child in the future.

For those who don't get such a glowing report, the Examen experts offer professional advice on what to do next in their fertility journey.

Meanwhile, myself and my wife have been able to continue trying for our second child with a bit more peace of mind and safe in the knowledge that we are one step further on in our very own fertility journey.

*Writer chose to remain anonymous.

All your skincare Essentials

The beauty industry is one of the most saturated in the world. There are so many brands, so many products, each promising to do wonderful things. So where on earth do you start? When it comes to the "science bit" with talk of acids, peptides, retinoids, oils, it all gets very confusing.

Sometimes all you want is a good, simple range of skincare which does exactly what you want – and need – it to do hassle-free.

A range which has no nasties, is reasonably priced and which you can go in to a store and buy the old-fashioned way, when you need. And I have found one which does all of the above and more.

Herbal Essentials is a capsule collection of essential products for your skin. There's a toner, a face cream (which can be applied day and night), an eye gel, a face mask and a make-up primer. And that's it. Everything you need, hassle-free.

Hydration is at the core of the products which are powered by Himalayan Active Water which is naturally filtered through 26,000 ft and clinically proven to boost the epidermal skin cell renewal process, which supports, protects and strengthens the skin barrier.

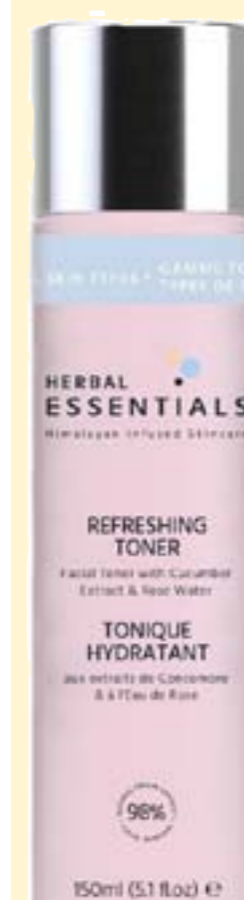
1. Refreshing Toner contains Cucumber Extract which provides the perfect base for hydration and soothes the skin, and Rose Water which has antioxidant properties that nourish and protect.

2. Hydrating Eye Gel is formulated with Sodium Hyaluronate and Aloe Vera to instantly brighten, plump, depuff and energise the eye contour.

3. Rescue Revive Sheet Mask revives and nourishes tired skin. Argan oil will condition the skin whilst Chamomile Extracts gently calm and soothe the puffiness.

4. Nourishing Cream is formulated with natural ingredients to replenish, plump, and smooth your skin for a natural, healthy glow.

5. Photo Finish Face Veil A hydrating skin make-up primer that visibly blurs pores, plumps the skin, and adds a soft peach radiance to your complexion, for the perfect make-up application. **All products are available at Superdrug and at www.herbal-essentials.com.**



1. Herbal Essentials Refreshing Toner, £15



2. Herbal Essentials Hydrating Eye Gel, £12



3. Herbal Essentials Rescue Revive Sheet Mask, £5



4. Herbal Essentials Nourishing Cream, £12



5. Photo Finish Face Veil, £15

WHAT'S HOT..

MADE-IN CITY I'm really looking forward to Jamie-Lee O'Donnell's TV show about the town she loves so well. Who better to show you round her home city of Derry than an actual Derry Girl? Be sure to tune in on Thursday at 10pm on Channel 4.



RIGHT WINGS My heart is a flutter every time I look at the new Sophia Webster x Butterfly Conservation shoes and even more so at the fact 30% of all profits from these styles will go towards conserving habitats and raise awareness of target species of butterflies and moths.



WELL SPOTTED Kate Middleton really seems to be on a roll with her outfits at the minute as she just keeps hitting the spot, particularly in this ensemble which everyone went dotty for at Royal Ascot. She's a finely-dressed filly indeed!



WHAT'S NOT..

THE HEAT IS ON The rain will certainly not be falling gently on the plane for anyone heading to Spain (myself included) as weather experts are predicting the country could reach record-breaking temperatures of 50C this summer. Ouch!



WEAR & TEARS So it seems Kim K's curves did damage Marilyn Monroe's iconic and historic Happy Birthday Mr President dress after all when she wore it to the recent Met Gala. It doesn't surprise me as it all seemed just too good to be true!



A BITTER TASTE A popular bakery in Tyrone – Rosie's Cakes – and St George's Market restaurant Bia Rebel this week announced plans to close due to rising gas prices and, unfortunately, they won't be the last in the hospitality business to do so. That's food for thought, or should it be fuel for thought!

