

Thanks for the family, Mrs Billings

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Betty Kanellakis and her children Jack-Lucas, Akexis Talia and Kristopher.
Picture: Ben Swinnerton Herald Sun

IN the 40 years since it was developed, the all-natural Billings Method has helped millions of women conceive.

BETTY Kanellakis wishes someone had told her about the Billings Method before she endured years of misery trying to get pregnant.

The Melburnian is now blessed with three beautiful children, but she wants to help other women avoid the distress that comes with fertility problems.

The Billings Method uses the body's "natural fertility signal" to achieve or avoid pregnancy. It's simply a matter of a woman learning to read her own cervical mucus secretions over her monthly cycle. The method won't solve all fertility problems, but in Ms Kanellakis's case it was the answer.

"I had married late in life, thinking I was going to have kids straightaway," Ms Kanellakis, 44, says. "My mother fell pregnant straight away with her three children, and I was thinking I'd do the same, but that wasn't the case."

She endured nearly two years of tests, monitoring and injections in the lead up to IVF and recalls the eight angst-ridden months of basal body temperature monitoring.

"My husband would record my temperature and chart it every morning," she says. "The problem was that if I got up early or got out of bed to go to the toilet, it misread the temperature."

Next came a blood test for serum progesterone to confirm ovulation, which involved hospital visits for seven days. "It was a hard time," says Ms Kanellaskis, tears welling as she thinks about how wretched it was.

"You'd get a call from your doctor telling you the dates you were supposed to be trying to conceive. It wasn't fun, it was straight to it; there was no lovemaking, it was very stressful."

Just before embarking on IVF, Ms Kanellakis was fortunate to fall pregnant. She was 34 when Jack-Lucas was born, and seven months later she was pregnant again with her second child, Kristopher.

But problems arose when she tried to conceive a much-wanted third child. That's when she rediscovered a book a friend had given her, *The Billings Method*.

"I didn't bother reading it the first time because I wanted to fall pregnant straight away, and thought IVF was the best way to go because others were getting pregnant on it," she says.

She attended the Billings LIFE clinic in Melbourne and with their guidance became pregnant within five months. "I didn't have that pressure, it felt stress-free and we enjoyed trying to get pregnant."

Ms Kanellakis can't believe how ignorant she was of her body's fertility cycle. "I wished I had picked up this book to start off with," she says. "It would have saved me a lot of heartache, stress and tension."

She believes information about the Billings Method should be more readily available at medical clinics.

It's more than 40 years since Dr Evelyn Billings and her husband Dr John Billings formulated the method. John Billings was a neurologist working in Melbourne when he first began the search for a reliable method of natural fertility regulation in 1953. The focus was on trying to prevent pregnancy back then.

Evelyn became involved in the research and started teaching the method in 1966.

Self-help guide *The Billings Method*, by Dr Evelyn Billings and Dr Ann Westmore, was published in 1980, and since then more than one million copies have sold. A new edition of the book is out now, and with an increasing number of women struggling to get pregnant, its focus has swung to the method being used to aid conception.

Says Dr Westmore: "At the moment with a lot of women delaying having a family, often because of career choices and so forth, there seems to be a bigger demand for a method that will help them achieve a pregnancy."

She says many women are ignorant of the body's natural signal of fertility, as was she before working with Evelyn in the late 1970s to make *The Billings Method* more user friendly.

"I was a science graduate and a medical reporter and I was totally ignorant of the changes to mucus that correlate with hormones," she says.

Dr Westmore says some women are embarrassed by the idea of mucus secretions, but it's a basic part of their make-up. "It is really useful information for the fairly significant proportion of women who have fertility problems or having trouble becoming pregnant.

"They should consider finding out about it before they go to more technological and expensive approaches such as IVF and other forms of assisted reproductive technology.

"And if they are considering the method as a form of contraception, they should see how it fits with their own needs."

She says studies conducted in conjunction with the World Health Organisation in five countries show that 19 of 20 women, about 94 per cent, were able to recognise and identify when they were fertile in their cycle.

"If you don't know about it, it could come as a complete surprise that you could do this," Westmore says.

But once you find out, it will be very useful to you."

See also: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/lifematters/stories/2011/3250865.htm> for an ABC interview on *The Billings Method*.