

Woman gives birth at 54 years-old

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Dr Ssali (right) and medical staff admire the newborn fondly known as Baby Precious

By Charles Wendo

A Ugandan woman has given birth at the age of 54, ten years after reaching menopause. The woman, a university lecturer, delivered a baby boy at the Women's Hospital International and Fertility Centre in Kampala on Thursday last week.

The baby boy, fondly known as Baby Precious, follows a 15-year-old girl. He weighed 3.1kg at birth which doctors said was a normal weight. He has been breastfeeding.

"I am ecstatic. I feel excited. I turned 54 the day I had him. We will have two birthdays to celebrate on the same day," said the mother, who protected her identity to safeguard her child from unnecessary stigmatisation when he grows up.

Usually women stop producing by the age of 45 when they reach menopause but in this case doctors used a method known as in-vitro fertilisation to help her conceive. Under the method, doctors extract a woman's egg and man's sperm, fuse them in a laboratory and then implant the embryo into the uterus.

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After menopause, a woman can be helped to conceive using her husband's sperm and donated egg from another woman.

"I had other children before. We wanted more; only we did not have the technology. We just seized the opportunity we had been looking for one."

Doctors said it was the first time in Uganda and possibly Eastern Africa that a woman gave birth at that age.

Women who have done in-vitro fertilisation in Uganda have tried four times on average before succeeding but Baby Precious' mother was lucky; her first attempt resulted in a successful pregnancy. "This was my first trial and we got this blessing."

Dr. Tamale Ssali, who heads the hospital, said the pregnancy had no complications but the baby was delivered by caesarean not to take chances. "She attended her antenatal clinics here. It all went very well."

The technology, referred to as test-tube babies, was introduced in Uganda in 2004. Since then, over 400 babies have been born at the Bukoto-based centre through in-vitro fertilisation.

The first Ugandan test-tube baby now goes to a nursery school in Kampala. "Stella is now five years and she is doing well in school. Her mother came back and delivered another baby," said Ssali.

Asked what she paid for the procedure, the woman said she had not yet totaled the costs.

The basic technical fee is \$3,500 (sh6.5m). This does not include drugs to stimulate the hormonal system, donor eggs or donor sperm if needed.

Key facts on In-vitro fertilisation

- In-vitro fertilisation was successfully used for the first time in the United States in 1981 and first introduced in Uganda in 2004.

- Involves fusing an egg and sperm in a laboratory and placing the embryo into the uterus.
- Used when women cannot produce eggs or when the eggs cannot move down the fallopian tubes or when men cannot produce sufficient sperm to cause pregnancy through sexual intercourse.
- A quarter of babies born through IVF are twins and 5% are triplets.
- In Uganda the basic technical fee is \$3,500 (sh6.5m); additionally is the cost of drugs, donor eggs or donor sperm where necessary.

This article can be found on-line at: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/701818>

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