

# Wollongong IVF patients to track embryo growth through

By Lisa Wachsmuth

Updated April 20 2017 - 5:05pm, first published 4:30pm

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 Success story: Clare Tonacia, with daughter Ellen, has welcomed a new app that will be available for free for Genea IVF patients from mid-May. Picture: Robert Peet

When Wollongong’s Clare and Karl Tonacia arrived at the IVF centre one morning in February last year, they had no idea if they’d have a viable embryo for transfer.

It had been a five-day wait since the egg retrieval, and while they’d been notified on day two that six of those eggs had been successfully fertilised there was no guarantee any had lasted the distance.

It had been an anxious time but the couple was rewarded with two viable embryos that day, and nine months later their precious daughter Ellen

was born.

They hope to one day provide a sibling for Ellen and will take advantage of a new app that will take the wait – and a lot of the uncertainty – out of the IVF process.

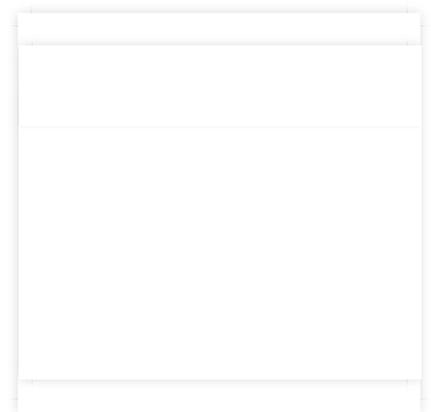
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The Australian-first app, designed by fertility group Genea, gives IVF patients 24/7 access to time-lapse photos and videos of their embryos in the lab as they develop. Grow by Genea even allows them to download those images and share them with family and friends.

Wollongong Genea fertility specialist Associate Professor Lionel Reyftmann said while patients were highly involved in the early part of an IVF cycle, they could feel detached during those crucial five days.

“One of the most difficult periods for the patient is waiting while their embryos are developing in the lab,” he said. “This app will give them insight into what goes on backstage while they are at home wondering and trying to anticipate what the outcome of the cycle will be.”



 First pictures: The Grow by Genea app gives IVF patients photos and videos of their growing embryos as they develop in an incubator in the lab. Picture: Genea Australia

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Prof Reyftmann said by viewing the development in real time, it could even prepare patients for eventual bad news. For those with a positive result, he said the images could be priceless. "It's a magical thing to be able to see your future baby."

For Mrs Tonacia, the technology means an end to those "dreaded phone calls".



"You get so anxious waiting to those dreaded calls from the embryologist – not knowing what they will say," she said. "This will put an end to the uncertainty and gives IVF patients a bit more control over the process."

"Having information and vision at your fingertips during those important five days, means you're prepared for what's coming."

"You're not going to get up early and get to the IVF clinic after the wait, just to be told there's no viable embryos and get sent home."

The couple is now relishing parenthood with their "beautiful, perfect" little girl.

"We'd been trying to get pregnant for two years before turning to Dr Reyftmann," she said. "Investigations found my husband had an autoimmune response, where antibodies were attacking his sperm making it impossible for it to reach and penetrate the egg."

“We could never have fallen pregnant without IVF.”

Mrs Tonacia said the new app would allow people to share their IVF journey with loved ones.

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“My husband actually got a photo of our embryo under the microscope the day it was transferred and we were excited to share it, and this app goes much further,” she said.

“People are more honest these days about their struggles with infertility and IVF, and it’s awesome there is now the technology available to share that.

“It means you’re not going through it all on your own.”

The app is in a trial phase and will be available for Genea patients for free from mid-May.

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