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Good News

Wollongong's Genea IVF clinic is giving hope to Illawarra couples battling infertility



By [Merryn Porter](#)

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Little miracle: Rachel McMinn and Michael Lewis with their son Riley, 1. Picture: Supplied

When Rachel McMinn and Michael Lewis met at Anytime Fitness, Unanderra, in 2012 it was love at first sight. After being partnered up for a boxing class the rest, as they say, is history.

Fast forward to 2017 and the couple decided to start a family, but their first

attempts ended in miscarriage, leaving them devastated.

By 2019, and fearing they were running out of time, the couple, who were living in Berkeley, decided to seek help. Their GP referred them to Associate Professor Lionel Reyftmann, a fertility specialist at Genea Elements IVF Wollongong.

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Family complete: Rachel McMinn and Michael Lewis with their 'miracle baby' Riley, 1. Picture: Supplied

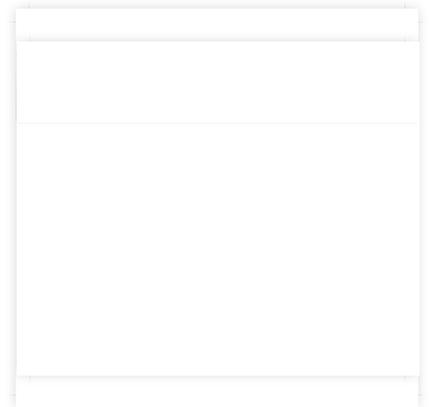
After a battery of tests failed to find a reason for their recurrent miscarriages, they were presented with a number of treatment options, including IVE.

"Given my age - I had just turned 39 - we decided to go ahead with the IVF process and have a full round of IVE," Ms McMinn said.

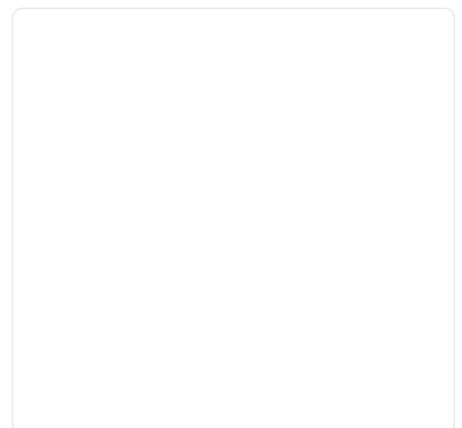
By this time the COVID-19 pandemic had started so the couple relied heavily on the support of the clinic's staff as they underwent treatment.

"We actually went through the whole IVF process during COVID," she said.

They underwent a cycle of IVF followed by an embryo transfer, but did not



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achieve a pregnancy. A second transfer was also unsuccessful.

Ms McMinn went straight into a second full round of IVF, which resulted in a pregnancy, but their happiness was short lived, with Ms McMinn suffering an ectopic pregnancy.

In between the cycles of IVF, the couple also managed to conceive naturally, only to miscarry.

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At times, Ms McMinn admits she wondered how much more they could endure.

"I do remember asking Dr Reyftmann, 'When is enough? When do you stop?' And he said, 'I will let you know when to stop when I can't do anything further'"

Despite this, the couple, who became engaged in July 2020, never gave up hope. They underwent a frozen embryo transfer on June 2, 2021, which was a success.

Not surprisingly, after so much heartbreak, they did not relax during the entire pregnancy, which was deemed high-risk.

A scare at 37 weeks relating to the baby's heart rate saw Ms McMinn hospitalised for a week before baby Riley arrived on February 2, 2022, small but perfect, after an emergency caesarean.

"It was definitely worth it. He has definitely changed our lives," said Ms McMinn, who is full of praise for the entire team at Genea Elements IVF Wollongong.

"How do you thank somebody for giving you a family?" Ms McMinn said.

They said Dr Reyftmann's calm nature and honesty during the process helped them through.

Genea Elements IVF Wollongong is leading the country when it comes to success rates for women in the 35-42 age bracket.

According to data on the [YourIVFSuccess](#) website, the clinic has a success rate of 38.6 per cent for births per complete egg retrieval cycle.

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The national rate for successful IVF pregnancies in women aged 35–42 is 24.6 per cent.

The Wollongong clinic's success rate for women aged under 35 is 56.2 per cent, which is also higher than the national rate of 41.4 per cent.

[YourIVFSuccess](#) was funded by the Federal Government to provide information on all fertility clinics in Australia using data submitted to the Australian and New Zealand Assisted Reproduction Database.

The success rates are independently calculated the same way for each fertility clinic based on all IVF cycles performed. Couples can look at a centre's IVF success rates before embarking on treatment.

Dr Reyftmann, who trained in Europe, said there were a number of variables that led to the clinic's success rates, with the age of women seeking treatment and remaining honest about their chances of success amongst the biggest factors.



 Honest approach: Associate Professor Lionel Reyftmann is a fertility specialist at Genea Elements IVF Wollongong. Picture: Supplied

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He said while detractors could argue the clinic excludes older patients to increase its success rates, it was more a matter of being honest with patients – both before and during treatment.

"When we treat older women, the selection of patients is critical," he said.

He said this meant "we do not sugar coat it".

"I am not saying to someone who is 42 or older, 'No, you can't try.' But I will say 'We will try two or three times and if we don't see anything positive we will stop.'

He said telling someone it is time to stop fertility treatment, no matter their age, was one of the most difficult parts of the job.

"Most people are distraught," he said. "It is one of the hardest things we do."

Dr Reyftmann said he also advised patients when it was time to take a break from treatment.

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"Sometimes we say, 'We need to stop, you need to stop.' It is unpleasant for us, but there is an expectation of trust."

He said it was a balancing act between giving people hope and letting them know when further attempts would be futile.

"We will encourage people to come back and keep fighting where we think there is a good chance for success," he said.

He said there have been instances when a couple has taken a break from treatment after two or three failed attempts, only to come back and have success.

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It is cases like this that makes his job the best in the world.

"I am not a cancer specialist. I feel like the luckiest doctor most of the time to be able to help these people to have that miracle baby," he said, but stressed it was a team effort involving everyone from the hospital wards man to the team at Genea.

"I always say it takes 15 people to get one baby," he said.

At a Glance

Genea Elements IVF Wollongong performed 250-500 individual treatment cycles in 2020.

Single embryo transfers accounted for 97 per cent of cases.

71 per cent of patients were first-time IVF patients.

The age of patients at the clinic in 2020:

Over 44 - 1 per cent (3 per cent nationally)

40-44 - 12 per cent (22 per cent)

35-39 - 30 per cent (38 per cent)

30-34 - 50 per cent (28 per cent)

Under 30 - 7 per cent (10 per cent).

Births per complete egg retrieval cycle (including the later transfer of resulting embryos):

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Under 35 years - 56.1 per cent (45.4 nationally)

35-42 - 38.6 per cent (24.6 per cent nationally)

Births per complete egg retrieval cycle (including the later transfer of resulting embryos) for women having their first ever egg retrieval:

Under 35 years - 63.4 per cent (50.3 per cent nationally)

35-42 - 45 per cent (30 per cent nationally)

Births per embryo that is transferred

Under 35 years - 38.8 (34.4 per cent nationally)

35-42 - 33.3 per cent (27.9 per cent)

39-42 - 18.2 per cent (17 per cent)

Causes of infertility

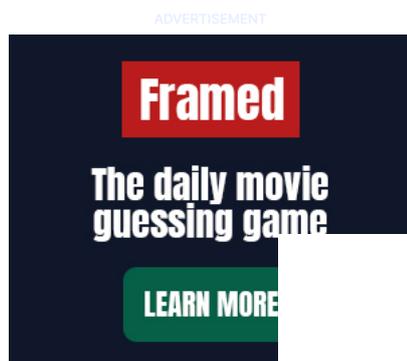
36 per cent - female factors

22 per cent - male factors

14 per cent - both female and male factors

28 per cent - unexplained

Source: [YourIVFSuccess](#)



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Journalist with more than 25 years' experience in print and digital media who has covered most news rounds, including health, education, politics (local, state and federal), police and courts, with a special interest in women's and family matters. Highly-skilled interviewer and storyteller.

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