

CITYHEALTH

>> PATIENT STORY

HEY, BABY!

FERTILITY ADVANCES MAKE MORE
BIRTHS POSSIBLE AT MEDICAL CITY

5 WAYS TO AVOID KNEE SURGERY

BARIATRIC SURGERY
REJUVENATES PASSION FOR LIFE

A DOGGONE GOOD WORKOUT

PEYTON FRENEY
is named for the doctor
who helped make her
life possible. See page
20 for Peyton's story.



FELINE PHOTOBOMBS

SEE PAGE 32 FOR OUR LOVABLE
MASCOT'S LATEST ADVENTURES

>> cover story



↑ - Peyton Freeny, with her parents Tracy and Jerry, celebrating the holidays in style.

HAPPY BABY!



FOR THE FREENYS, getting pregnant wasn't easy. But with some help from the fertility experts at **Medical City**, they were able to welcome Peyton Noelle to the world.



HEY, BABY!

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THE PREVIOUS PAGE

→ **TRACY FRENEY BELIEVES SHE WAS RAISED TO BE A STRONG INDEPENDENT WOMAN BY A MOTHER WITH BIG DREAMS.** “My mom had three girls,” she says. “She wanted us all to go to college and have a career.”

Freney didn’t disappoint. “I was always very ambitious,” she recalls. “I pursued a career in pharmaceutical sales and was very focused on moving up the corporate ladder. Before long, I moved to the Chicago area, worked hard, and just enjoyed life.”

As much as she enjoyed her career, Freney never thought postponing marriage or pregnancy might jeopardize her dream of one day having a baby. In fact, when she married at 34, having a baby right away wasn’t in her plans.

“Even at 35, I’d pick up a tabloid and I’d read about

celebrities having babies in their late-30s, even in their 40s. I wasn’t worried.” But soon enough, Freney heard the proverbial tick of her biological clock, and she and her husband, Jerry, decided it was time to try for a baby.

Before getting started, Freney scheduled an appointment with her OB-GYN. “We got the green light,” she says. “He told me if nothing happened, to come see him again in six months.” Six months later, Freney and her husband were back in his office. “We were taking temp checks, but nothing happened. So we had a round of blood work.”

Fertility Snapshot

Freney didn’t realize it, but she was about to embark on a journey she never expected.

“It’s a night I’ll never forget,” she says. “We were hosting a dinner party, a celebration, and the phone rang. It was my OB-GYN. He

asked if it was a good time—then he said the results of my blood work were back.”

The results indicated she was in perimenopause—the early stages of menopause. It also showed her egg count was

very low. “He said the chances of me having a baby on my own were slim to none,” she remembers. It was a difficult diagnosis, but it gave Freney and her husband a road map as they began the path toward pregnancy.

Freney isn’t alone when it comes to fertility struggles. But there is a test that may be able to help women who wish to delay pregnancy.

“The AMH test is a simple blood test, but it’s an important test. It lets women know about their ovarian reserve or egg number, regardless of their age,” says Noel Peng, M.D., a reproductive endocrinologist at Medical City Dallas Hospital and founder and medical

MEET DR. PENG

Noel Peng, M.D., has completed advanced subspecialty fellowship training in reproductive endocrinology and infertility. Dr. Peng is board certified in reproductive endocrinology and infertility and obstetrics and gynecology. Reproductive endocrinologists undergo extensive advanced medical training that enables them to accurately diagnose the many conditions that can lead to infertility and treat the conditions effectively. For more information, call **972-566-6868** or visit DallasInfertilityMD.com.





Freeny says Peyton willed her way here—and she knows Peyton is here to make a difference.

But most doctors will oblige a patient's request for the AMH blood test.

Dr. Peng adds that although Tracy was only 36 at the time, her situation was typical of those seeking fertility treatments. The development of the AMH blood test makes it possible for women to have important information about their reproductive health even before they are actually trying to conceive. "You can get a test and have an idea about your egg reserve, so it can help you," explains Dr. Peng.

"Most of my patients who have been trying unsuccessfully to get pregnant or have had multiple miscarriages have

lower ovarian reserve."

The AMH blood test is important because it measures levels of the Anti-Müllerian hormone, a substance produced by cells in ovarian follicles. Dr. Peng says it's one of the more accurate tests available to reveal such information. "Just because patients look perfectly healthy doesn't mean they have a healthy egg count."

Similar advances in the field mean women today can make important decisions to protect their fertility and their ability to conceive a healthy baby even before they're ready to be pregnant (see page 24).

Persistence Pays Off

A normal pregnancy was all Freeny could think about. Yet it seemed nearly impossible after her first appointment with Dr. Peng. "He was very candid," she says. "He told me he'd seen my case and many women in my situation were not able to conceive."

Still, the Freenys decided to take their chances and try medications and intrauterine insemination—a type of artificial insemination where the sperm are placed directly into the uterus around ovulation.

Embarking on the process wasn't emotionally easy. As close as Tracy had always been

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director of IVF (in vitro fertilization) Institute.

"It's a relatively new blood test," says Dr. Peng. "But it's simple and inexpensive, and it can be very helpful for women who are making important decisions about how long they want to wait to start their families.

Though the test is available to women through their OB-GYN, it isn't typically a part of a standard blood workup.

Peyton is all smiles and loving life. Jerry and Tracy relish in the big dreams they have for their daughter.



to her mother, she kept her fertility struggle to herself. "It's the elephant in the room. I told her we were trying, but infertility is something we don't talk about."

So Tracy and Jerry kept their fertility treatments private. The shots, the implantation—everything up until the day she found out she was pregnant.

"We had almost given up on the thought of having a baby," Freeny says. "In fact we went out to Los Angeles and bought our dream car instead. We had just signed the papers on that car and then we found out we were having a baby. God is a comedian sometimes. We got them both!"

She did eventually share the story of her fertility struggles with her mother and the rest of her family, too. "It felt so liberating to tell her what had happened," says Freeny.

More awareness is catching on, too. "Before, they just suffered in silence. Now they are more likely to seek help," says Dr. Peng. And sometimes, as he likes to

22 to 32 percent of infertile women ages 35 to 40 are able to give birth using fertility technologies.

point out, seeking help doesn't mean it will end with high-tech medical technology to solve a fertility problem.

He recalls one patient who came to see him after unsuccessful attempts at IVF. "I did a test, and she had polyps," says Dr. Peng. "I removed the polyps, and she got pregnant." He laughs. "She said, 'Wow what happened?' And I told her it doesn't always take the most expensive solution to fix the problem."

Freeny was 37 when Peyton Noelle was born. It's been a whirlwind 18 months as she's adapted to motherhood.

And just like her mother before her, Freeny has big dreams for her daughter. "She will have a strong faith," Freeny says. "She knows without a shadow of a doubt she willed her way here. Her life was not happenstance—it was intentional, and she's here to make a difference." 

COMPREHENSIVE, COMPASSIONATE CARE

Planning a Family? At Medical City, you'll be pampered and protected. Learn about our labor and delivery program at TheCityDelivers.com.

→ Fertility Breakthroughs

The AMH blood test is just one of the latest advances in fertility treatment. These are some other highlights:

PRESERVING EGGS

Men have been freezing sperm for a long time. Now, women have that option for their eggs.

Through a new process called vitrification, eggs are flash frozen—without the worry of ice crystals forming. That means it's now possible to harvest a woman's eggs at peak fertility and bank them for use at a later date. "It could be very empowering for women," says Dr. Peng.

So far, he's had some patients who've opted for the procedure. "It means a patient can have the option of preserving her eggs, if she knows she will be delaying motherhood or if she is facing



an illness or surgery that may threaten her fertility," he explains.

There are certain guidelines to ensure the best outcome for frozen eggs. Typically, a woman's eggs are most plentiful and are of the best quality before age 36. "In general, the eggs of a twenty-something are going to be stronger in quality," he says. However, a successful pregnancy isn't necessarily tied

to youth. If a woman is otherwise healthy, a successful pregnancy is determined more by the age of the egg than the age of the uterus, says Dr. Peng.

Although the vitrification process is a new science, it's believed eggs can be frozen and stored successfully for many years. Once a woman is ready to become pregnant, the egg is fertilized through conventional in vitro fertilization.

EARLY EMBRYO SCREENINGS

Preimplantation genetic screening (PGD) is a revolutionary tool for in vitro fertilization. It allows doctors to actually screen a developing embryo before it's implanted, enabling doctors to check for potential catastrophic genetic defects before implantation.

"Usually when the embryo is

five days old, there is enough information to check for genetic disease," says Dr. Peng. "You are actually looking for genetic mutations." If a couple has undergone genetic counseling and is aware of the possibility of a disease that could affect an unborn child, this information is critical, says Dr. Peng.

"If I know the mutation, the embryos can be checked. This is important before they get pregnant, so parents don't have to struggle with difficult decisions later on."

The implantation of a healthy embryo raises the odds of a healthy pregnancy for both the mother and the child. "Once I see a heartbeat and a normal screening, I feel much better about the chances for a healthy pregnancy," says Dr. Peng.

Early on, Peyton showed she knew how to strike a pose for the camera.

