



# Twins, triplets and multiple births

Fertility revolution in progress. It is emerging as the 'wild west' of medicine where things are greatly unregulated and have bypassed all ethics and antiquated laws. They may sound bizarre and make an ideal script for a science fiction thriller. Imagine a dead man fathering a dozen kids and a single child having multiple parents and still be a loner !

The field remains trapped between optimistic researchers who consider it all experimental,

and the public, which is itching to embrace the technology...More and more ways of making babies are emerging and this may rewrite the fine art and science of human reproduction.

Ever since the first test tube baby was born in 1978, fertility clinics have mushroomed and the industry has become a fertile ground for web of technologies promising a perfectly programmed child. IVF - the cornerstone of assisted reproductive technology – is another haphazard gambit ending in multiple pregnancy.

In February, Farah Khan became a proud mom of triplets – three babies – one boy and two girls.

43-year-old Farah gave birth to the triplets after a caesarian operation conducted by Dr. Firoza Parikh at Mumbai's Jaslok Hospital. Farah was conscious throughout the delivery. Twins and triplets have become a norm today.

Think of all the work involved in baby care, just multiply it by three and you can fathom the feel of a mom with three babies. Twins and triplets have significantly increased throughout the world. Mostly they are a result of assisted reproduction.

We talk to Dr. Rachel Franklin, M.D., a Board Certified Family Medicine specialist and Associate Professor of Family and Preventive Medicine at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, where her clinical focus is on Women's and Children's Health, including the practice of primary care Obstetrics and Pediatrics.

Dr. Franklin is also the author of "Expecting Twins, Triplets and More: a Doctor's Guide to a Healthy and Happy Multiple Pregnancy" (St. Martin's 2005) and is a contributor to TWINS Magazine, which regularly features her columns on Pregnancy and the First Years with Twins.

## Heal-India Editor, Shahid Akhter in conversation with Dr. Rachel Franklin



Dr. Rachel Franklin, M.D.

### HEALINDIA Why did you write this book ?

**RF** When a woman finds out that she's pregnant, only to discover later that she's having twins, she may very much feel like she's been "duped." Her fear and insecurities may mount as stories of complications are thrown at her by well-meaning friends. She may go to the bookstore in search for reassurance and find little to comfort her.

### HEALINDIA Is there a difference between twins born normally and twins coming from IVF?

**RF** We do not recognize a difference in twins whose parents conceived them naturally and those who were the result of IVF. They are equally healthy, intelligent and otherwise indistinguishable from each other.

### HEALINDIA Here is a sharp increase in multiple births among couples who undergo IVF?

**RF** There is indeed an increased risk of multiple pregnancy due to IVF, because during most procedures, more than one embryo is placed in the woman's uterus. Some patients and doctors choose to implant only one embryo at a time, but the procedure is so expensive and invasive to the mother that most want to increase the chances of success by placing more than one embryo inside.

Multiple births increases the risk of low birth weight, prematurity and other complications like neurological disorders. These risks can certainly be minimized if only one embryo is transferred during IVF. Possibly more than one are added as a safety valve but sure this increases the risk of multiple births?

Implanting more than one embryo does increase the risk of multiple births.

### HEALINDIA Is there any limit to the number of embryo being transferred ?

**RF** Most doctors recognize that transferring too many embryos increases the risk of multiple births, including the birth of up to 7 or 8 children, and can result in significant risks to the health of the mother and her unborn children.

### HEALINDIA A growing number of genetic tests can be performed during in vitro fertilization, before pregnancy even begins. Is that a good thing?

**RF** Genetic testing prior to transferring embryos is a controversial issue in this country and in some others as well. If a person were interested in doing tests before IVF transfer I would suggest they discuss it with their healthcare provider, their family and their spiritual advisor. 