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MEDIA RELEASE

CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS IMPACT OF OBESITY ON FERTILITY, PREGANCY AND CHILD HEALTH

Being overweight or obese can impact on a person's ability to conceive and have a healthy pregnancy and baby, according to Fertility Week 2015, a public education campaign held in the first week of spring (September 1- 7).

On average, women who are overweight take longer to conceive than women who are of a healthy weight. Women who are overweight or obese can experience hormonal changes that interfere with ovulation; they are also more likely to develop high blood pressure and diabetes during pregnancy, experience miscarriage or stillbirth, have a baby weighing more than 4.5 kilos, or have a caesarean section to avoid birth complications more common with large babies.

In men, obesity is associated with lower fertility, which has multiple likely causes including chronic health problems, lower testosterone levels and erectile problems.

"Just as being overweight or obese can significantly impact your health and increases your risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease or some types of cancer, it can also have a direct impact on a person's fertility and ability to have a healthy baby," said Louise Johnson, CEO of the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA), the lead agency of the Fertility Coalition, which manages Fertility Week.

"While we all know people who have managed to conceive or have a healthy baby despite being overweight, the research shows that weight is a significant factor affecting fertility and maternal health," said Ms Johnson.

"The good news is that for people who are overweight, just a 5-10% reduction in body weight can make all the difference to getting their fertility – and their general health - back on track," Ms Johnson said.

Fertility Week is run by Your Fertility, a national public education program funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services. Each year Fertility Week highlights factors affecting a person's ability to have a baby. This year it will be focusing on weight.

Your Fertility has partnered with **Livelihood** to promote positive messages about ways to make lifestyle changes – including diet and exercise - in order to increase a person's chances of



conceiving and having a healthy baby.

“Changing habits to improve diet and other lifestyle factors like exercise during pregnancy to reduce weight gain really can have positive effects on the health of a mother and their child,” Ms Johnson said.

But a prospective parent’s diet and exercise decisions in the months leading up to conception can also impact on pregnancy health and the long-term health of a child born.

During Fertility Week, Professor Sarah Robertson of The Robinson Research Institute will be delivering a public lecture on research results that reveal lifestyle and environmental factors during pre-conception and pregnancy can have a lasting impact on child's health.

Entitled ‘Parenting begins before conception’, the lecture will discuss how the health of the parents before conception transmits information that determines the health of children after birth and throughout life, and the so-called ‘epigenetic’ mechanisms involved. Epigenetics affects not just fertility and pregnancy health, but the life course potential of offspring, particularly their susceptibility to non-communicable diseases including heart disease, diabetes, allergy and asthma, and neurological conditions.

Your Fertility is managed by the Fertility Coalition: **Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority, Andrology Australia, Jean Hailes for Women’s Health and The Robinson Research Institute.**

- For more information about Fertility Week visit www.yourfertility.org.au
- For more information about ‘Parenting begins before conception’ visit <https://www.varta.org.au/events/parenting-begins-conception>

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