Clomid in focus
What you need to know

Clomid is a brand name for a pill containing clomiphene citrate - a fertility drug prescribed for lots of women with PCOS who are trying to conceive. Shaheena Soomar lays out what you need to know...

“Clomiphene (previously spelled clomiphene in the UK) is first line therapy, as it is a tablet and it is much easier than hormone injections, which are the best treatment of Clomiphene doesn’t work,” says Professor Adam Balen from the Leeds Centre for Reproductive Medicine – one of Verity’s medical advisers. Other brand names include Serophene and Milophene.

What exactly does Clomid do?
Clomid stimulates the ovaries to produce an increased number of mature follicles each month. It works to increase three hormones which are key to the ovulation process, says the Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. These are Luteinising Hormone (LH), Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH), and Gonadotropin-releasing Hormone (GnRH). Clomiphene tricks the body into thinking that it does not have enough oestrogen, and these increased hormones then stimulate ovarian follicular development.

When will it take i?
You will take Clomid at the start of your cycle as this is when FSH levels are rising, which produce follicles, that in turn produce oestrogen. Clomiphene inhibits the action of oestrogen on the pituitary gland, binding oestrogen receptors and tricking the body into thinking there’s less than there is. As a result, your body secretes more GnRH, LH and FSH.

Why is it useful for PCOS fertility problems?
Many women with PCOS have trouble ovulating in a regular cycle, and if they do not ovulate at all. Clomid is a treatment designed specifically for this problem, known as anovulation (when the ovaries fail to release an egg).

What are the success rates with PCOS?
“7 out of 10 women will ovulate with Clomid and around half of that number will get pregnant,” says Professor Bill Ledger, Professor of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at Sheffield University. It is also important to be aware that there is a 35% to 50% chance of multiple pregnancy (especially twins and sometimes triples) when you take Clomid. “Pre-treatment counselling should include discussion of the possibility of multiple births,” says Professor Ledger.

What will happen if you and your specialist decide it’s the right thing to try?
“Before starting treatment it is important to optimise health, take folic acid, have an assessment for Rubella immunity and also a check to see that your fallopian tubes are open. Your partner should also have an assessment of his sperm function,” says Professor Balen.

Once you are ready for the treatment, your doctor will give you a course of Clomiphene to take orally on specific days of your menstrual cycle – usually towards the start. Dosages are commonly 50 mg, and a course lasts for up to six cycles. If Clomiphene doesn’t seem to be working after the first couple of cycles, the dose may increase to a maximum of 150mg, as higher doses are rarely beneficial.

The treatment is usually monitored with a combination of ultrasound scans to assess the development of the follicle and to check that the womb lining is developing satisfactorily.

How long will I have to take it?
You can’t take the drug for long periods of time. “Clomiphene is only licensed for six months use in the UK, and so we would advise careful counselling of patients if clomiphene therapy is continued beyond six months, because most pregnancies that do occur will do so within this time” says Professor Balen. It is possible to take several courses of Clomid with breaks in between, but several Verity members have reported that the NHS will only fund a limited number of cycles (please discuss this with your doctor). Professor Ledger adds that “most GPs will not prescribe Clomid, so the patient would need to go to a fertility clinic”.

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