

Egg-freezing perk for female staff

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Health Editor

The UK's largest chain of IVF clinics is in talks with companies to offer egg-freezing as a perk for female employees. The first company could sign up within months.

The benefit allows women in their twenties or early thirties to focus on their careers without sacrificing the chance of having a family.

Advocates say it gives them a chance to delay children until they are financially secure or have found the right partner, but critics say it encourages women to work through their natural childbearing years.

Apple and Facebook have subsidised egg-freezing, up to a cost of around £16,000, for the past two years. CARE Fertility, which has 16 clinics in the UK, is in talks with companies to subsidise a package, including four cycles of egg retrieval, that would normally cost £5,500. Robert Smith, clinical

director of CARE London, said professional women often needed to "graft" for a decade to reach a management post, when they could take time off.

Clotilde, 42, a brand director for a cosmetics company, froze her eggs with CARE London in 2013, when she was 38. Clotilde, who is single, decided she was ready to start a family last year, after she had moved back to Paris.

The executive had her eggs thawed and went through IVF using a donor she chose from a US sperm bank; she is expecting twins. Clotilde, who did not want to give her surname, said: "I tell friends they should do this before they are 38. I was very lucky."

But Josephine Quintavalle, of Comment on Reproductive Ethics, said women needed a society that let them have children when it was natural: "The real liberation is a society that allows women to have children when they are easily conceived, and at an age at which it is easy to bring them up."