

Latest lesson on the birds and the bees

AMY NOONAN

SEMEN has a far bigger role in the fertility process than first thought, Adelaide researchers have uncovered.

In a process that researchers have described as a "two-way dance", semen actually "communicates" with a woman's reproductive tract, preparing it for pregnancy.

Professor Sarah Robertson, co-director of the University of Adelaide's Research Centre for Reproductive Health said the important research, an Australian-first, "opens up a whole new realm for understanding how fertility is controlled".

"We have discovered that semen doesn't just fertilise an egg. It actually contains signalling molecules that are responsible for activating immune changes in women so they can accept a foreign substance in the body - in this case, sperm - leading to conception and a healthy pregnancy," Prof Robertson said.

"It's rather like a two-way dance. The male provides the information that increases the chances of conception and progression to pregnancy, but the female body has a quality control system which needs convincing his sperm is compatible..."

Expectant mother Lili Harvey welcomed the news ahead of the birth of her IVF twins today.

"It's hard enough taking all that medication and doing IVF, if you could just take medication that's brilliant," Mrs Harvey said.

Women aged 18-40 who have undergone a tubal ligation and are in a stable sexual relationship with a man who has not undergone a vasectomy are needed for further research.

For more details email helen.alvino@adelaide.edu.au or phone 0419 843 418.



GOOD NEWS: Mother-to-be Lili Harley is expecting twins to arrive today.

Picture: DEAN MARTIN