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INFERTILITY is no longer considered just a woman's problem, with Australian researchers uncovering that a man's age, lifestyle and even his genes are a driving factor preventing him from becoming a dad.

With half of all IVF cycles involving male infertility, scientists from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research in Melbourne are now leading studies to track both the children of infertile men born via IVF and men preparing to undergo assisted reproduction, to uncover how sperm is damaged and whether infertility is passed on to their sons.

Professor Rob McLachlan, an IVF specialist and medical director of national reproductive resource Healthy Male, told the institute's public forum that while men continue

to produce sperm into old age, this sperm was not as healthy as that produced in a man's younger years.

"There is more damage, more nicks in the DNA of older sperm," Prof McLachlan said. "If you're going to have children, men need to plan to have them earlier in life.

"Some of the things you do in your lifestyle can creep through and change the dimmer switch on the genes."

Prof McLachlan is leading a project to uncover what genes are involved in male infertility to devise new treatment fixing the root cause.

"Unless you know the cause of why the sperm count is poor, or the shape of the sperm is poor, you can't fix it," he said.

"Now we have powerful new gene analysis techniques and we're beginning to get some breakthroughs of genes that could be the cause."