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Age, lifestyle and genes all factors in rising infertility in men

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

With half of all IVF cycles involving male infertility, Hudson Institute of Medical

Research scientists 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, also an IVF specialist and medical director of the national men's reproductive health resource called Healthy Male, told the institute's public forum that, while men continue to produce sperm into old age, it was not as healthy as what was produced in 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."

With colleagues at Monash University, Prof McLachlan is leading a national research

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.

"In the last 25 years since we developed ways of injecting the sperm into the egg, we have bypassed this problem. But now we have powerful new gene analysis techniques and we're beginning to get some breakthroughs of genes that could be the cause.

"There are going to be lots of different things — infection, STIs and genes buried in there that are causing what we see now as just low sperm quality."