

There's more to life than being a mother waiting to happen

Kate Johnston is determined that she will not be defined by playing the IVF waiting game.

HOW much of our life is spent waiting? When a date says he'll pick you up at 8pm and he's not there at 8.20pm, anything you do to distract yourself will be useless — deep down, you're waiting. We wait for small things and large. For the last 18 months, I've been waiting to know if I'll ever fall pregnant.

I've just started my third IVF cycle. They call it treatment, but whenever anyone mentions the word infertility, I go into gentle denial: I'm not "barren" as my mother's generation knew it; I just took ages to meet the right guy (you could say I waited to meet him) and it turns out that, what

with my age and his "lacklustre" sperm, after 12 months of trying it hadn't happened.

Every month was spent waiting for two particular days to come around: ovulation and the first available testing day. But month after month, the double-whammy of pre-menstrual symptoms and the knowledge that this equalled no pregnancy, only more waiting, did my head in.

I tried to give myself the best possible chance. I read everything on natural fertility methods and, perhaps foolishly, bought promises of miracle answers from the internet. I meditated and worked through my fears and negative

beliefs regarding motherhood. My partner and I got uber-healthy with regular acupuncture and naturopathy. But giving up chocolate biscuits and red cordial wasn't the answer. Not that I regret a thing: our considerable lifestyle changes have only improved our sex life. But the word "trying" in "trying to fall pregnant" just adds pressure. What effort is required exactly? How could I try to fall pregnant? We did everything we could and then waited for ol' Mother Nature to work her ultimate mystery.

Now I'm tired. Tired of waiting not only for a positive result, but also for that one solution that is going to get me up the duff. I'm sick of reading about women who drank disgusting herbs for a month and then, wham bam, baby in a pram. I've drunk disgusting herbs

for 12 months. There is no solution because there is no problem that anyone can find. I'm not going to wait for answers any more.

My 81-year-old mother recently checked herself out of a nursing home, calling it "God's waiting room". I've been a "waiting

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womb" for more than a year now. I believe in preparation, but living in a constant state of anticipation saps the fun out of living. I am as ready as I'll ever be to be a mum and no amount of dealing with the

past or brewing leaves from a rare Indonesian tropical plant can force my fate. I'll continue to do what I think is best for my body, but it's become crystal clear that my state of mind now is all I have (perhaps it's all one ever has). And if that must include an element of waiting, then so be it. But my life will no longer be dominated by waiting.

I was scared to take on IVF — it's tough on relationships, I'd heard; it's an emotional tsunami, I'd read. But contrary to others' experiences, so far ours hasn't been as awful as I'd imagined. The disappointments have been acute but, and for this miracle I'm truly grateful, the process has brought my partner and me closer together.

We may not try IVF the incredible 18 times a despairing stranger in a cafe revealed to me that she

and her now ex-husband had, to no avail. I don't know how long is long enough yet. But in the meantime, the desire to have a child, though deep and strong, and the IVF treatment, though time-consuming and odious, are only a part of my daily life: important but not everything.

Not identifying who I am with what I am doing — and with the subsequent results — could turn out to be ideal preparation for motherhood.

And if I am never a mother, well, I'm still capable of unconditional love, albeit for the characters from *Sex and the City*. I'll look to be patient and tolerant towards the people that most frustrate me. Now there's a challenge I need not wait to take on.

Kate Johnston is a Melbourne writer.