

be ideal, harvested over a number of cycles – although quantity is no reflection of quality.

“My gut feeling is I’ve got more of a chance of falling pregnant naturally now than by using my frozen eggs,” she says, but she is keeping them stored for another five years just in case: “At 45, it might be completely different.”

Safety in numbers

Translator Karen Griffin, 39, didn’t mind the injections, responded well to the drugs and has 21 eggs stored after two cycles. She saw Dr Gedis Grudzinskas at his independent, private practice in London and he referred her to El Centro de la Fertilidad, a clinic in Spain that he collaborates with because it has more experience of egg freezing than UK clinics. “It’s important to do everything I can,” says Karen, who’d like a sibling for her six-year-old daughter. “Who knows, I might be single for a few more years, but maybe I’ll meet someone in my late forties.”

Dr Grudzinskas says egg freezing acts like a safety net: “It’s not complete insurance, but it’s something that may take the edge off a woman’s anxiety.” This was the case for one of his patients – a woman who froze her eggs at 37 and thawed them at 42. The procedure didn’t work, but she felt she had done everything within her power to become a mother and had enjoyed five worry-free years. “The day I had my eggs frozen, my life changed. I could live my professional and social life normally,” she told him.

Open to options

If you want even greater insurance, however, it is best to freeze embryos (fertilised eggs), which have better success rates. National average live birth rates from frozen embryo transfer are around 20 per cent per cycle*, and individual clinics report even better results. Storing embryos would, of course, involve having a partner at the time of freezing or using donor sperm. For me, this wouldn’t make sense as I still hold out hope of meeting someone and trying for children with him – although I see how this would appeal as a back-up plan. However, many women object to a procedure that involves the storing and potential discarding of human embryos on moral, cultural or religious grounds.

And if you don’t go down that route, there is always egg donation, which experts say is highly

effective. Donor eggs come from women under 35 and many clinics treat recipients up to the age of 50. Initially, using another woman’s egg didn’t appeal to me, but fertility doctors say most women forget the egg is not their own as soon as the embryo implants. They nurture the baby inside their womb, give birth to it and breastfeed it. I definitely wouldn’t rule it out in future, but I would weigh it up against adoption.

Personal path

While stalling the biological clock sounds tantalising, my instinct tells me egg freezing is not for me. At my age, the odds are not in my favour. Maybe it’s naive, but I still prefer to trust that what will be will be, and that motherhood will work out if it is meant to – and if it is not, I will be okay with that.

If I were five, ten or 20 years younger, what would I do? Dr Lockwood says women in their twenties produce a large number of eggs with just a small dose of drugs. But Professor Winston’s words still ring in my ears – it’s early days for this technology and there are no guarantees. I wonder if, one day in the future, girls will ask their parents for the ultimate 21st-birthday gift: not a car, jewellery or a round-the-world trip, but for their eggs to be frozen and stored.

Today, at 42, I think I’m better off spending my time, energy and savings on fun, travel and dating in the hope of meeting a guy I might be able to have children with in the future, naturally – God willing – and if not, I know I still have options. ●

Katherine Baldwin is writing a book on social infertility called The Baby Gap and writes a blog at fromfortywithlove.com

Egg-freezing: the true figures

15-20

The ideal number of harvested eggs needed for fertility treatment, according to a study by The University of Sheffield.

£4,000

The average cost of an egg-freezing cycle, including consultations, fertility testing, drugs, egg retrieval and freezing.

£250-£500

The cost of storing frozen eggs for one year, excluding thawing and fertilisation.

16,000

The number of eggs that had been stored by women in the UK up to 2011*.

25%

The chance of a healthy woman under 30 getting pregnant naturally each month.

5%

The chance of a healthy woman over 40 getting pregnant naturally each month.