

MEMORIAL'S COMMUNITY MAGAZINE

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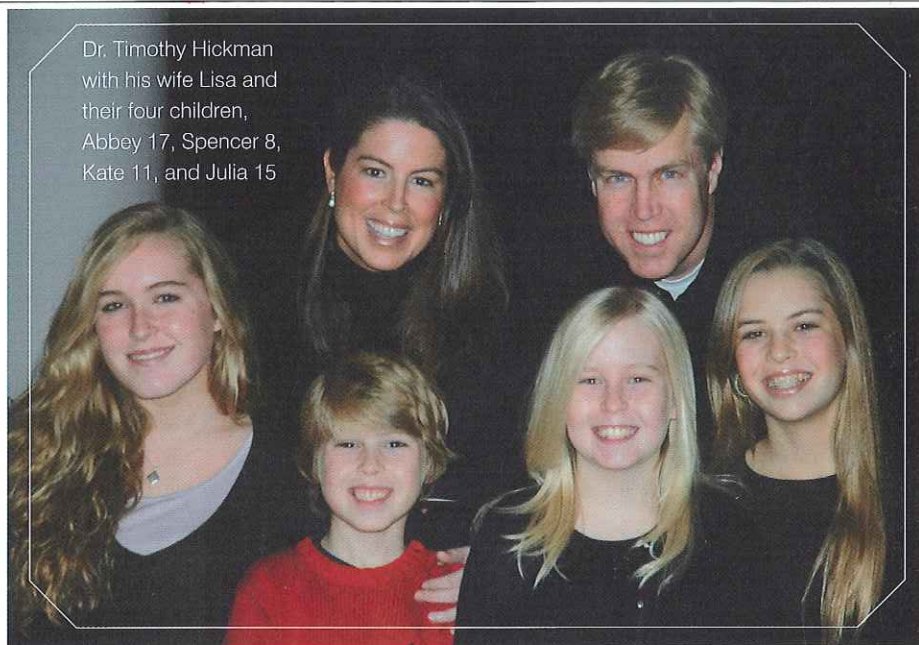
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PAYING IT FORWARD

# Dreams of a Family

DR. TIMOTHY HICKMAN IS HELPING COUPLES REALIZE THEIR DESIRE TO BE PARENTS. *By Melissa Landrum*

With Mother's and Father's days just around the corner, this can be a stressful time for couples who are having difficulty starting families of their own. So we recently chatted with one of the leading fertility specialists in the country, Timothy Hickman, M.D., of Houston IVF. From his office in the brand new Memorial Hermann Tower at Memorial City, Dr. Hickman provided information about the latest advances in fertility medicine that are helping more and more childless couples realize their dreams of having a family.



Dr. Timothy Hickman with his wife Lisa and their four children, Abbey 17, Spencer 8, Kate 11, and Julia 15

**Q** What convinced you to specialize in reproductive endocrinology?

**DR. HICKMAN:** "When I rotated through OB/Gyn and attended my first delivery, it was such a miraculous experience for me. The joy of being part of new life where I saw a child in the arms of her happy parents was the turning point. Years later after my wife Lisa and I had tried far too long to start a family, I was personally drawn to infertility. Having known the despair and loss that couples go through, I wanted to help."

**Q** Describe the satisfaction of knowing you've helped couples realize their dream of having a family.

**DR. HICKMAN:** "My wife and I struggled for years to have our own children. There is despair and loss that couples and women who have never gone through it cannot understand. Eventually, we sought out evaluation and treatment. Three of our four children are the result of fertility treatments. We feel very thankful and blessed that we have the opportunity to raise the children we love so dearly. I am humbled and honored to assist people in fulfilling their dream of having children. Bringing life into this world is the greatest miracle and the greatest joy. Having a part in helping couples realize their dreams gives me a satisfaction and happiness that words cannot describe."

**Q** What are some of the biggest advances in in vitro fertilization (IVF)?

**DR. HICKMAN:** "Louise Brown, the world's first IVF baby, was born in July 1978. For the next 15 to 20 years, IVF

remained somewhat experimental. Low success rates were common, and physicians often resorted to transferring many embryos back into the uterus in an effort to help couples get pregnant; this often led to an increase in twins, triplets, quadruplets, etc. As time has passed, we have improved our processes, enabling IVF doctors to grow embryos for a longer period of time and transfer fewer embryos into the patient's uterus to achieve high success rates."

**Q** What should a couple consider before consulting a fertility specialist?

**DR. HICKMAN:** "Couples should consult a board-certified reproductive endocrinologist. At Houston IVF, we draw on the strength of our sister clinic, the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine, and its IVF clinic. It's had the highest success rates in the country for the last 10 years and has been named the number one clinic in the nation

by *Child Magazine*. All our embryologists are trained there. We have built a mirror image of the Colorado lab here in Houston.”

**Q** How does a couple know when they're ready for IVF?

**DR. HICKMAN:** “The age of the woman is very important in infertility. If she is younger than 35 years of age and there are no known reasons why things haven't worked, the couple should try for a year before seeking consultation. If she is 35 to 39 years of age and there are no known reasons why things haven't worked, the couple should try for six months before seeking consultation. If she is 40 years of age or more, or if a known reason exists such as irregular cycles, blocked tubes, low sperm count, etc., the couple should seek consultation right away.”

**Q** What is the most common misconception about IVF?

**DR. HICKMAN:** “Because IVF has become so successful in recent years,

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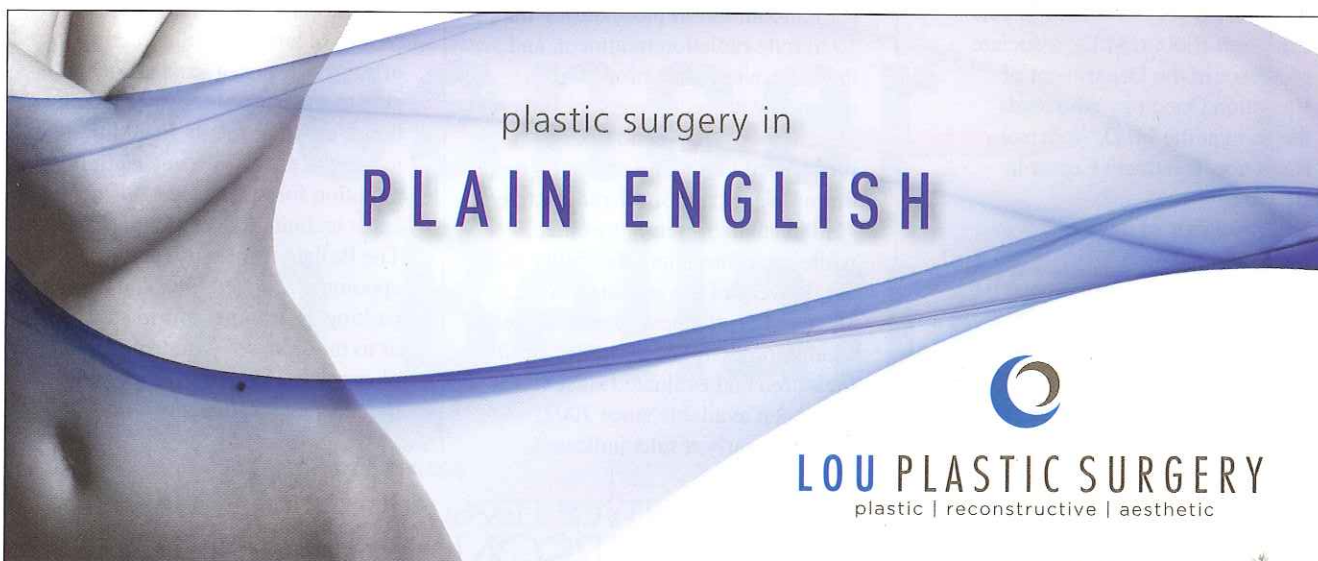
— *Dr. Timothy Hickman*

many couples think they can put off having children indefinitely. However, IVF after age 45 doesn't work if a woman uses her own eggs. All babies from mothers over the age of 45 are from donor egg IVF where a young 20+-year-old woman donates eggs to an older woman. Donor egg IVF is a wonderful alternative for certain couples, but many are caught off guard when they realize that having a child with the wife's eggs at 46 is not possible.”


**Q** How does the Octomom case cast a bad light on IVF advances?

**DR. HICKMAN:** “After serving on the executive council for the Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology (SART), I've been involved in many international discussions about this case that illustrate both the triumph and the tragedy of medical innovation. The obstetricians who cared for Nadya Suleman should be praised for helping her get to near 31 weeks of gestation before delivery. The tragedy of this case stems from the infertility doctor and the misguided patient who got in the situation in the first place. The American Society for Reproductive Medicine and SART have guidelines geared to achieving the highest pregnancy rates possible while minimizing high-order multiple pregnancy rates. Using this guideline, the doctor should have transferred a maximum of two or three frozen embryos. Instead, he transferred six. Two of the six split, and she ended up with eight babies. This was a completely avoidable situation.”

To learn more about Dr. Hickman and Houston IVF, visit [www.houstonivf.net](http://www.houstonivf.net).



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Lou Plastic Surgery | Professional 2 Building  
909 Frostwood Drive, Suite 340 | Houston, TX 77024

713-932-7290 Office  
713-932-6056 Fax

