Human eggs from blood cells? New technique could ‘transform reproduction’

Scientists in Japan made progress recently in the quest to combat infertility, creating the precursor to a human egg cell in a dish from nothing but a woman’s blood cells. The research is an important step toward what scientists call a “game-changing” technology that has the potential to transform reproduction.

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In the new experiment, [researcher Mitinori Saitou] created stem cells from human blood cells and then guided them to develop into “primordial” reproductive cells at a very early stage of egg development. His team was able to keep the cells alive for four months by incubating them in a dish with mouse ovary cells. The cells developed into oogonia, precursors of mature egg cells that appear during the first trimester of pregnancy.

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[T]he societal and ethical questions begin to multiply. Could someone unknowingly be made a parent without their permission, if someone creates reproductive cells from a cheek smear? Could women’s biological clocks be turned back or eliminated if the need for egg harvesting ends? Would the ease of creating many eggs make in vitro fertilization far more routine? And could the ease of creating eggs, in turn, allow parents to more routinely screen out genetic diseases?
Scientists say the time to start deliberating about those scenarios, educating the public and talking about oversight is now.

Read full, original post: The ‘game-changing’ technique to create babies from skin cells just stepped forward