

# Age and Fertility



Increasing age reduces the fertility of both men and women, although to different extents.

The decline in women's fertility becomes apparent from the early thirties, and is more significant from the mid-thirties. The chance of successful conception in each natural menstrual cycle is nearly 20% in women aged 30 or less, but drops to 5% in women by the time they turn 40. The chances of falling pregnant and, because of the higher rates of miscarriage, going on to have a baby is rare in women over the age of 45, even though menopause does not occur till after 50 for most women.

The main effect of age on female fertility is a reduction in 'ovarian reserve'. Ovarian reserve refers to the number and quality of eggs that remain in the ovaries and is reduced in older women. Pregnancies conceived in older women have a higher chance of carrying chromosomal abnormalities and therefore miscarriage.

The age of the woman also affects the success rates of infertility treatments, such as IVF. The older the woman, the lower the chance of having a baby through IVF, or other fertility treatments, when using her eggs.

Age also affects men's fertility but at a later stage and on a smaller scale compared to women. To some extent, having more frequent intercourse can compensate for this. Having intercourse every two to three days is ideal for fertility.

It makes sense to include the potential effect of age as one of the factors to consider, when deciding the appropriate time to start trying for a baby.

If you are trying for a baby and either of you has any known problems that you think may affect your fertility, then you should seek advice from your GP at an early stage. Otherwise it is reasonable to try for one year before seeking advice. If the woman is over 35 years of age, you should see your doctor if you have not managed to conceive after 6 months of trying.

Some women may also choose to have 'fertility preservation' – they undergo IVF and freeze their eggs or embryos for use in the future. This becomes and increasingly unlikely to be a suitable option after the age of 35, but is something you can seek individual advice on.