

matter of age

Is there any right time to start a family? Most experts will say no. We say there are pros and cons. Read on to gather more.

by PRIYANKA SOOD

In the era of age-defying products, there is one thing which is bound by age, and that is the human reproductive system. Nevertheless, pregnancy in general is planned around certain things. The obvious ones are health, finances and an established career. However, with time, there seems to have been quite a few additions to the list. Women, now, are looking beyond. Issues as basic as getting married to the right man have started garnering her attention. And once married, factors such as 'living up to the bucket list' are ruling the roost.

Needless to say, all the factors combined have pushed up the pregnancy age, especially in urban India. Thirties have become the new twenties. Gone are the days when getting married at 22 and pregnant at 24 was the rage. Couples today want to take it easy before planning a family. They want to settle down first, travel extensively and boast of a certain amount of success before taking the family route.

However, experts warn of the trend. "Thirty-five is the cut off for women," claims Dr Shivani Sachdev Gour, gynaecologist, SCI Healthcare, Delhi. Women are born with certain number of eggs and they lose them over their reproductive life span. "At some point—about 10 years before the onset

of menopause—the number drops to a level where the fertility is compromised," informs Dr Kiran Coelho, gynaecologist at Hinduja Healthcare Surgical, Mumbai.

Although men are physically capable of fathering children even in their 60s, sperm quality deteriorates with age and there's a higher risk of genetic defects. "Therefore, for a pregnant woman of 35 years, the chances of her child being born with Down Syndrome is one in 350, for a 40-year-old, it is one in 110 and that for a 45 year-old woman it is one in 30," adds Dr Coelho.

"In India, women hit menopause at the age of 47. Ten years prior to it—at 37—the best of eggs are released. That is why at a later age, especially after 40, the chances of miscarriages and abnormalities in the babies increase," says Dr Duru Shah, chairman, Gynaecworld and Gynaecworld Fertility Centre, Mumbai. However, very few people opt for pregnancies in their forties. "Mainly because they are either too hesitant or follow moral values that make them feel uncomfortable," explains Dr Gour.

Each stage poses its own set of physical and emotional pros and cons that may influence everything. Smoothness of a pregnancy, impact on new baby on the your relationship comes under the scanner.

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20s

The Primetime

So you are in your twenties and are having a baby on your mind? The twenties are the most fertile years in a woman's life, which makes it "an ideal time for pregnancy," says Dr Coelho. The periods are regular and most of them are ovulatory, which means an egg is produced every month.

What's more, being in twenties also gives you ample opportunity to have a healthy pregnancy as the energy levels are high. Even the risks involved are less. "Psychologically also, it is the best time to have a baby," adds Dr Coelho. Getting pregnant in your twenties also keeps you away from food-related stress. "In your twenties, your digestive system is the healthiest, which leaves food an open area for you. Anything taken in moderation and in consultation with your nutritionist can never go wrong for your body," informs Dr Tanuja Sodhi, nutritionist and wellness expert with *parentune.com*.

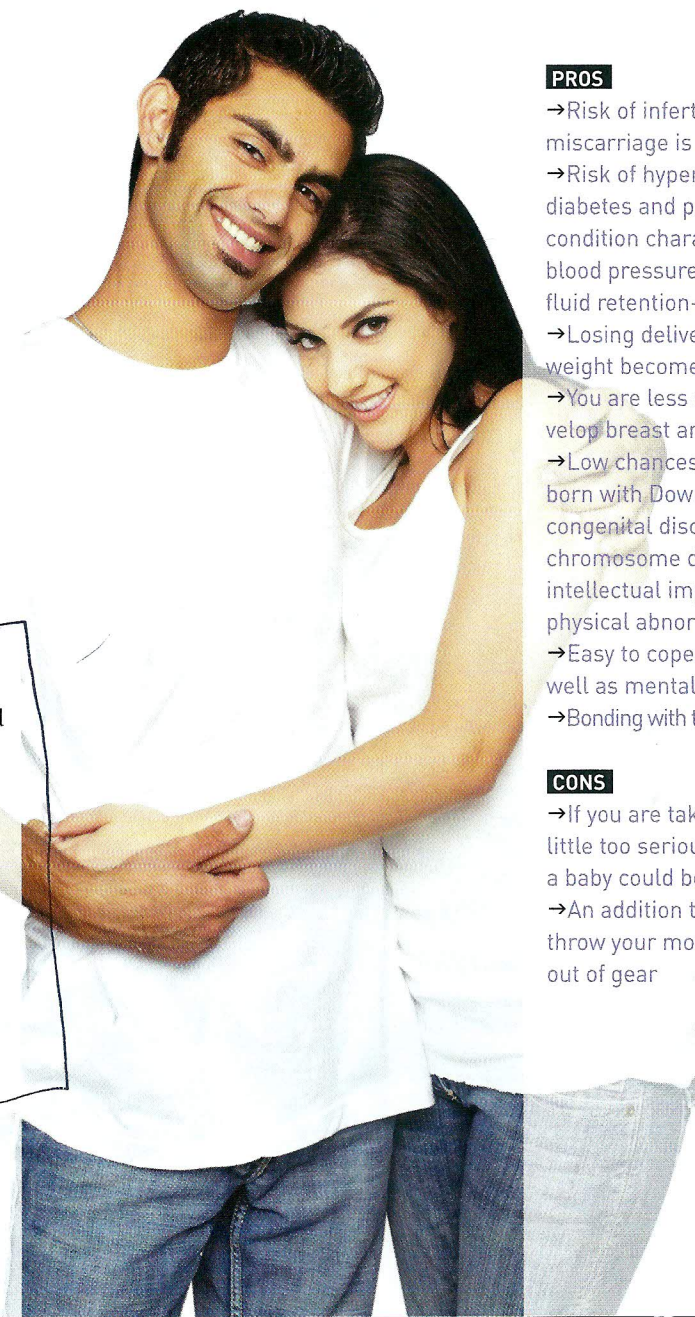
According to experts, 24 is an ideal age for a woman to endorse motherhood. So, if you have decided to give the rubber a skip, "there are 20 per cent chances of you getting pregnant every month," informs Dr Shah. However, twenties is also the time when women, especially in urban India, are often busy settling down with their careers. "Even the existence of nuclear families makes it difficult for women to opt for a child. Also, there are hardly any child care centres in India which thus makes a women all the more hesitant to go ahead to start a family," says Dr Coelho.

PROS

- Risk of infertility and miscarriage is the lowest
- Risk of hypertension, gestational diabetes and pre-eclampsia—a condition characterised by high blood pressure and sometimes fluid retention—are also low
- Losing delivery and postpartum weight becomes easier
- You are less susceptible to develop breast and ovarian cancers
- Low chances of your baby being born with Down Syndrome—a congenital disorder arising from a chromosome defect which causes intellectual impairment and physical abnormalities
- Easy to cope with physical as well as mental stress
- Bonding with the infant comes easy

CONS

- If you are taking your career a little too seriously, then arrival of a baby could be bit of an intrusion
- An addition to the family might throw your monthly budget out of gear





if you
 plan to conceive after 35, there are increased chances of you delivering twins or triplets. Many women who are unable to conceive naturally opt for fertility centres, where the treatments result in such a probability

30s

The Mixed Bag

Planning a pregnancy in 30s has positives and negatives in an equal proportion. In your early 30s, your chances of getting pregnant are only slightly lower than in your late 20s. However, after 35, it decreases and the risk involved increases. "The reason for a decrease in the fertility level is because the body is unable to produce as many healthy eggs," says Dr Shah. Thirties comes with the word caution. So, once you set your mind on the target, you will have to take that extra mile. Do away with all the lifestyle habits that you feel can be unhealthy for the baby. Eat right, sleep right and exercise right. Says Dr Sodhi, "With age, gastric problems might set in, especially with women who are above 35. Also, the food that you eat can have a direct bearing on your blood pressure. Therefore, women getting pregnant after 35 should be very careful with what they eat." Also, planning pregnancy after 35 increases the chances of delivering twins or more. Explains Dr Coelho, "After a certain age, irregularity in ovulation occurs which disturbs the eggs and their fertility factor. Many women who are unable to conceive naturally, approach fertility centres, where the treatments result in a higher probability of delivering twins or triplets."

PROS

- You are physiologically and psychologically ready for pregnancy
- You are financially stable to take care of the extra member in the family
- You still have a lot of stamina and resilience, qualities that will help you become a better parent
- You are appropriately mature to take care of the infant

CONS

- You are susceptible to certain complications
- Risk of miscarriage increases, especially after 35
- Your risk of preeclampsia is higher as are the chances of having a baby with Down syndrome, diabetes or other chromosomal abnormalities
- Caesarean rate goes higher as soon as you touch 35
- Premature birth, before 37 weeks of fetal growth with underweight, is likely
- The infant might have feeding difficulties



40s

The treatment zone

getting pregnant in 40s can lead to increased rate of pre-existing hypertension and other complications



Naturally, 40s is a tough and nearly impossible age to get pregnant. "And, the chances all the more plunge once you hit the 45 button," informs Dr Gour. So, if you are in your 40s and are planning a pregnancy, the only option left with you is to go for In-vitro fertilisation. However, even if you opt for a treatment, it becomes a high risk zone, both for the baby and you.

Getting pregnant in your 40s can lead to increased rates of hypertension and pregnancy complications such as gestational diabetes mellitus and pre-eclampsia. Your infant can be born with certain chromosomal abnormalities, some of which can lead to mental retardation.

"Research has shown that one out of every 127 babies born to a mother above 40 and more had chromosomal disorders compared to one out of 370 babies born to mothers between 35 and 39 years of age," says Dr Neelam Mohan, senior paediatric gastroenterology and liver transplant, Medanta Hospital, Delhi. Even the risk of having a preterm birth (before the 37th week) is higher for older moms.

So, is 40s a 'complete no' zone? "No is rarely an answer for us," says Dr Gour, who caters to hundreds of patients seeking IVF treatments for late pregnancies. "A good and clear pre-pregnancy counselling can be a blessing for women who are planning a late pregnancy," assures Dr Coelho. 🍌

PROS

- Age has made you confident and patient, an important factor during child birth
- You are emotionally and mentally ready to take on the new role

CONS

- The probability of miscarriage is high
- If you're having multiples, there's an increased chance of delivering pre-term or low birth weight babies.
- You are at high risk of encountering gestational diabetes, elevated blood pressure and pre-eclampsia
- At 40, your chance of having a baby with Down syndrome is the highest
- With reduced physical energy, it might get difficult for you to fulfill the demands of motherhood as well as tackle stress
- Children born to older mothers may have feeding difficulty, hearing, vision and speech disorders.
- The other risks associated with older maternal age include, foetal malformation, foetal death, and increased risk of maternal cardiometabolic disease.

