

Planning to become pregnant at 35 and beyond? Here's what you need to know...

If you're older than 35 and hoping to get pregnant, you're in good company. Many women are delaying pregnancy well into their 30s and early '40s for a variety of reasons — **and delivering healthy babies**. Taking special care of yourself and seeking medical advice and prenatal care -- will help ensure that you give your baby the best start.

We often hear references to “my biological clock is ticking.” In other words, your ovaries contain a limited number of eggs, and it's a fact of life that as get older, your eggs decline in quality and you ovulate less frequently. An older woman's eggs fertilize less easily than a younger woman's eggs. Therefore it might take longer to get pregnant, but pregnancy is possible.

So, there's nothing magical about age 35, but one's age is typically a predictor of pregnancy success rates. For example, the pregnancy rate for a 24 year old is 45%, whereas at age 42 it's only 10%. **The good news is that if you are 35 years old (or older) and want to determine your biological ability to get pregnant, your OB/GYN can administer a specific test that gauges your ovarian reserve.** Besides taking a full history and performing a complete gynecological exam, serum blood testing is obtained and specialized sonography is performed. The information derived can help guide you so you can make informed decisions and better plan the timing of your pregnancy.

Having a baby at 35 and beyond does have some inherent risks to consider with your doctor as you develop a pre-conception plan ...

- Multiple gestations. In vitro fertilization can play a role since these procedures typically enhance ovulation; they're more likely to result in twins or other multiples.
- Gestational diabetes is pregnancy related, and tends to be more common as women age.
- High blood pressure during pregnancy such as preeclampsia may affect your baby's growth and development. In this case, your doctor will prescribe medication or deliver your baby before your due date to avoid potential complications
- Cesarean section deliveries are more common to older mothers since they have a higher risk of pregnancy-related complications that may block the cervix. Labor problems are more common in **first-time mothers** older than 35.

- Higher risk of certain chromosome problems, such as Down syndrome. Miscarriage risk also increases as you get older, due to the higher likelihood of chromosomal abnormalities.

Pay special attention to taking extra special care of yourself so that you have the best possible pregnancy outcome. Make a preconception appointment with your OB/GYN. Follow the advice of your doctor during your prenatal care. Choose your foods wisely, eat healthful foods, and make sure you take enough folic acid and iron during your pregnancy. Gaining the right amount of weight supports your baby's health. A weight gain of 25 – 35 pounds is recommended for normal weight women. Stay active and get regular exercise. Boosting your energy level will make you feel well and can prepare you for labor and childbirth. Stay away from alcohol, smoking, and illicit drugs during pregnancy. When taking medications or supplements discuss and obtain clearance from your doctor. Learn about prenatal testing for chromosomal abnormalities that include noninvasive blood tests and invasive procedures such as CVS and amniocentesis.

Look toward the future

Before conception, make the right choices that will make a positive lasting impression on your baby and family. Think of pregnancy as an opportunity to nurture yourself and