

“I’m only 21 and I’ve just started a great job. There’s no way I’m ready to settle down! Of, course I know I’ll be a parent one day, but why should I be thinking now about having kids...?”

young people

Most people in their early twenties are too busy having fun, living life, travelling, studying or building their careers to even think about the prospect of settling down and having kids. There’s plenty of time for that later. Or is there?

When should you have a family?

When you decide to have a family – if that’s what you want – is entirely up to you. And we all know that for some people, kids will never be part of their life plan. But if you are contemplating kids “one day” there are some basic facts about men’s and women’s fertility you really do need to know.

Too many Aussie couples in their late 30s and 40s have learnt the heartbreaking truth that having a baby isn’t as natural or as simple as we sometimes presume. In fact, one in every six couples experience fertility problems and for many of them, age is one of the major factors.

Fertility problems are not uncommon –

- > for 30% of infertile couples the problem is solely the man’s reduced fertility
- > for 30% of infertile couples the problem is solely the woman’s reduced fertility
- > for the remaining 40%, both have fertility problems.

Moving from contraception to conception

Many Aussies don’t realise women are born with every egg they will ever produce and the older they become, the more their eggs deteriorate. Women are born with somewhere between one and three million eggs and only 3-400 of those are lost through ovulation, the remainder simply die. Women are not the same as men who

can continue to produce sperm well into their old age, although they do go off as they get older (the sperm, not necessarily the men!). Put simply, old eggs and sperm do not produce healthy embryos.

It is much easier for women under 30 to get pregnant. It gets much harder after that. Even IVF won’t help if you leave it too long. Over 40, the IVF pregnancy rate is significantly lower, and those movie stars having babies in their 40s may be using donated eggs from young women. The scary fact is that the number and quality of a woman’s eggs drop at least 10 years before fertility is lost.

For men, sperm quality and quantity is best under 35, but poor lifestyle choices can result in poorer quality sperm which is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage and birth abnormalities.

What should I do to give myself the best chance of becoming a parent in the future?

Planning for parenthood is just as important as planning your career or your finances. It is part of planning your life.

It’s all about being sensible about your health, and taking a good look at your lifestyle choices. To look after your fertility, aim to maintain a healthy weight, avoid drugs, alcohol and smoking, and be careful not to put yourself at risk of sexually transmitted diseases.

All these things can impact on your future fertility but they are things you can do something about.

Our message to young people is simple. It’s not our business to tell you if – or when – you should have kids. We just want you to know the sort of information that so

many people tell us they “wished they’d known” about fertility and some of the ways problems could have been avoided.

Surveys of young men and women tell us that most would choose to have two or three children, but the sad reality is they will more likely have one or none.

Not having children is also a valid choice.

Women’s Fertility

- > women are born with all the eggs they will ever have : 1-3 million eggs
- > only 3-400 eggs will ovulate, the remainder simply degenerate
- > rate of degeneration varies between individuals. So biological age does not always equate with chronological age
- > chance of pregnancy in any month is best before 25 and fertility starts to decline after 30
- > at 35 the chance of conceiving is half that at 30 and at 40 is half that at 35
- > numbers and quality of eggs drop at least 10 years before fertility is lost

Men’s Fertility

- > male fertility declines from 35
- > genetic material in sperm deteriorates with poor lifestyle
- > associated with higher risk of miscarriage and birth abnormalities

Lifestyle factors affect conception:

- > age: IVF can’t fix old eggs
- > weight and medical history
- > drugs, smoking and alcohol
- > sexually transmitted diseases such as Chlamydia contracted years before