Age and fertility – a fact file

Australians' knowledge of age-related fertility decline

• In a 2012 Your Fertility survey of Australian men and women who wanted to have children, or more children, only 20% correctly identified that women’s fertility starts to decline in the early 30s.

• One third of women and more than half of the men stated that they thought female fertility starts to decline at age 40, that age doesn’t affect fertility or that they didn’t know when female fertility starts to decline.


Chance of conceiving a healthy baby diminishes with age

• A study of the Hutterite women of North America – a sect which bans contraception and is therefore an ideal population to observe changes in fertility with age – found that 11% of women were infertile by age 34, 33% by age 40 and 87% by age 45.


• A comparison of fertility-related outcomes between women aged 30 and 40 shows that the monthly chance of conception decreases from 20% to 5%.


• Per-cycle fecundity drops from a peak of 25% to 30% per month in the early to mid 20s, to less than 5% at age 40.


• A comparison of women aged less than 30 and older than 40 shows that the risk of chromosomal abnormalities in the fetus increases from 1 in 385 to 1 in 63.

Source: The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

• In a study of more than 1 million pregnancies which were intended to go to term, 9% of women aged 20-24 experienced pregnancy loss compared with 54% of women aged 42 or more.


• 62% of women who had IVF in 2011 in Australia and New Zealand were over 35; 26% were over 40.

Source: National Perinatal Epidemiology and Statistics Unit, ART report
**IVF does not ‘trump’ age-related fertility decline**

• In a survey of 3000 women without children, 65% believed that before menopause, assisted reproductive treatment can help most women to have a baby using their own eggs.


• By age 43, the chance of a woman becoming pregnant (with her own eggs) through IVF is less than 5%.


**Male age also affects chances of conception and having a healthy child**

• Increasing male age is associated with decreased pregnancy rates and increased time to pregnancy. In one study of more than 8000 pregnancies, after adjusting for female age, conception during a 12-month period was 30% less likely for men over age 40 years compared with men younger than 30.


• Children of older fathers are at increased risk of schizophrenia and other mental health disorders, autism spectrum disorders and mental retardation.


• There is an increased risk of miscarriage and fetal death with higher paternal age. Prospective data from 23 821 pregnant women in the Danish National Birth cohort showed that pregnancies fathered by men aged ≥50 years had almost twice the risk of ending in fetal death.

Source: Paternal age and reproduction, Human Reproduction Update, 2009

• Children with fathers aged 40 or over were 5 times more likely to develop an autism spectrum disorder than children with fathers aged 30 or less.