



## **PREGNANCY IN YOUR 30S AND BEYOND**

Over the past two decades the increase in the number of women becoming pregnant in their 30s and 40s has increased dramatically. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the birth rate for women in their early 30s rose 31%. The birth rate for those in their late 30s rose 60%. In the 1990s, the rate of increase slowed for those in their 30s, however the rate for women in their 40s nearly doubled. Clearly, women today are making different choices than their mothers. Is this cause for concern?

Women are having healthier and safer pregnancies than ever before largely due to advances in medicine. Women are entering into pregnancies healthier and more knowledgeable. No matter how healthy a woman may be, there are still risks beyond her control that are associated with delaying childbearing into her late 30s and beyond. Here are some of the risks and concerns:

- **Fertility** - It is not unusual for a woman in her 30s or older to have a more difficult time getting pregnant than someone in her 20s. Women in their 30s and older ovulate less frequently, they have more uterine problems such as endometriosis and fibroids, and their hormone levels may be changing. Consult your physician if pregnancy has not occurred after 6 months of trying. On the flip side of fertility, the chance of bearing twins peaks for a woman between the age of 35 and 39 and then declines.
- **Health problems** - Many health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure do not develop until a woman is in her 30s or 40s. These conditions and others can create problems for the mother and the developing fetus if undetected and untreated. It is very important to see a doctor before you get pregnant at any age, but in particular, for older women. Continuing prenatal care is very important, too. Women in their late 30s are twice as likely to develop diabetes and high blood pressure during pregnancy than women in their 20s.
- **Birth defects** - The number of certain chromosomal disorders such as Down syndrome, increase as the mother's age increases.

Please note that 70% of all children born with chromosomal disorders are born to women under 30. Sometimes these disorders are genetically determined and have nothing to do with age. Ask your doctor for more information on prenatal testing such as amniocentesis and CVS (chorionic villus sampling). These tests and others help to determine chromosomal disorders in the first trimester. Ninety-five percent of women who undergo prenatal testing receive reassuring news that their babies do not have a disorder.

- **Complications** - Studies have shown that women in their 30s are no more likely to have premature or stillborn babies than women in their 20s. However, due to

the increase of health problems of women in their 30s and beyond, the chance of low birth weight, placental problems (placenta previa and placental abruption), bleeding problems, and miscarriage do increase in women over 35. The increase in the miscarriage rate is believed to be linked to the increase in fetal birth defects in the older mother. A miscarriage will result in the first trimester when a fetus is developing abnormally (such as with chromosomal disorders).

- Labor and delivery - Studies have shown that women in their 30s are more likely to have fetal distress and prolonged second stage labor. This may indicate why the rate of cesarean sections increases for women in their 30s by 30% and by 80% for women age 35 to 40.

Communicating with your doctor before and during a pregnancy is the key to a healthy pregnancy while in your 30s and 40s. Ask your doctor about vitamins, eating habits, exercise and weight control. As always, it is important to abstain from smoking, alcohol and drugs while pregnant.

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