Men Have a Ticking Biological Clock Too

Older fathers can also experience male infertility and poor sperm quality that may jeopardize the health of both mother and child.

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Fertility declines in women as they age, which is why women are often told their biological clock is ticking. But new findings published in the journal Maturitas reveal that men who delay fatherhood face an increased risk of having kids born with a host of health problems and partners who develop pregnancy complications, reports Rutgers Today.

Although the start of advanced paternal age is not clearly defined, this window of time can fall anywhere between ages 35 and 45. (Interestingly, studies show that children in the United States are increasingly being born to fathers older than 45 years old.)

The results from 40 years of research found that men over 45 are at risk for decreased fertility, which boosts their partners' risk for pregnancy-related medical issues such as gestational diabetes, preeclampsia (high blood pressure in expectant mothers who never had the condition before) and preterm, or premature, birth.

Older men had an increased likelihood of fathering infants at risk of the following: premature birth (before the completion of 37 weeks of pregnancy), late stillbirth, low Apgar scores (a measure of how well a newborn baby tolerates the birthing process) and low birth weight.

In addition, the newborns of these men suffered from a higher incidence of seizures and birth defects, such as congenital heart disease and cleft palate.

Furthermore, as these kids got older, they were more likely to develop childhood cancers and autism in addition to psychiatric and cognitive disorders. (Scientists believe these illnesses may occur because of a natural decline in testosterone levels as a result of aging, degraded sperm and semen of inferior quality.)

"While women tend to be more aware and educated than men about their reproductive health, most men do not consult with physicians unless they have a medical or fertility issue," said Gloria Bachmann, MD, director of the Women's Health Institute at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in Piscataway, New Jersey, an author of the study.

Bachmann suggests that doctors talk to men about how age affects conception, pregnancy and their children's health. In addition, Bachmann recommends men consider banking their sperm before reaching age 35, or at least by their 45th birthday, to protect the health of their partner and child.

For related coverage, read "Have Sperm Counts Declined?" and "Better Sperm Quality and Function Noted in Men Who Snacked on Nuts."

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