



Want to put off having a baby, but not sure how to prolong your fertile years? **Poornima Makaram** speaks to experts to find out how to slow down the menacing tick-tock of the biological clock

STOP THE CLOCK

Megha Nair is a 32-year-old corporate lawyer, who put off matrimony for an exciting career in the boardroom, sitting across the table from successful men and brokering high value deals. One old-fashioned question from a senior and stodgy male colleague on when she would trade in her black coat for the joys of kitchen and babies jolted her back to reality.

"The prime reproductive years slip away before you know it and putting off having children to your late 30s is not without risk. For starters, the quality of eggs begin to dwindle after you turn 30 and then there are so many other health factors to consider," says Bangalore-based gynaecologist Dr Rajani Nayak.

Making babies the pleasurable way

When you want to take a break from science, give aphrodisiacs a try. Here are the popular mood-setters.

- Sunflower seeds are high in magnesium and zinc.
- Fresh figs are a sign of womanhood and thought to put you in the mood for sex.
- Oysters are high in mucopolysaccharides which will up your love quotient.
- Chocolate releases dopamine, which reduces your stress levels and increases your libido.
- Moderate amounts of champagne can give you that warm, fuzzy feeling and lower your inhibitions.

"I would ideally advice women to have their babies before the mid-30s, but if it is inevitable then there are things you can do to up the chances of having children later," she says.

One option would be to freeze your eggs—which would be the best way to ensure you conceive later. Apart from that, you also need to take care of your body. "Don't smoke or do drugs as this can negatively impact your reproductive health. Alcohol should also be had in moderation or avoided if possible. Talk to your doctor about any serious health or sexual problems you face, to determine if this will affect your fertility at a later date," she advises.

"Regular checkups for all conditions including Endometriosis and Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome and ▶

Diet dos and don'ts

Mumbai-based nutritionist and dietitian Kajal Thosani says, "Even though being over 35 is associated with an increased risk of certain pregnancy complications, you can manage a healthy regimen and avoid complications. The older you are, the more likely you are to develop health disorders like diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol or thyroid issues due to stress or other genetic factors. But you surely can plan and adapt a healthy lifestyle to help you conceive at a later age." Here's her advice.

DOs

- Include good soya products like soya milk, soya chunks or granules to maintain your oestrogen level.
- Consume adequate protein, like milk, eggs, lean cuts like fish or chicken and dal/pulses—this is a major nutrient required to form the placenta and umbilical cord.
- Deficiency of zinc could lead to increased risk of miscarriages. Therefore an increase in the intake



of zinc-rich foods like cereals, eggs, fish, tomatoes, spinach, walnuts and yoghurt is advisable.

- Calcium is another important mineral to strengthen your bones and facilitate cell processes. Include low-fat milk or curd and leafy vegetables in your diet.



- Essential fatty acids help in healthy hormone functioning in the body, so include nuts and oil seeds in limited amounts in your diet.

● If diabetic, overweight or hypertensive or even if you have a family history of these ailments, switch to complex carbohydrates like cereals, vegetables and fruits and avoid white products like refined flour, sugar and salt.

- Keep your weight under control and maintain a good exercise routine. Obesity and excess fat are the chief causes of poor fertility.

DON'Ts

● Alcohol consumption can reduce fertility, so eliminate alcohol from your diet and give yourself the best possible chance of conceiving.



● Smoking induces early menopause. If you are planning a baby in your 30s, stop smoking immediately to increase your chances of conceiving later.



To boost fertility, eat more zinc-rich vegetables like tomatoes, spinach, cauliflower and carrot.

STDs will go a long way in ensuring that you prime yourself for better chances to conceive and carry the baby to full term. Keeping yourself generally healthy is the key to prolonging your reproductive health," adds Rajani.

The fitness angle

Being fit works in your favour at all times, but more so when you want to have a baby at a later stage in your reproductive life. Doctors and trainers stress on the need to be fit to give birth to a healthy baby, as it increases your chances of conception and a trouble-free pregnancy.

Fitness expert Wanitha Ashok says, "Exercise has many benefits, and one of the main benefits is stress

release. Stress leads to many health issues and one of them is weight gain, which directly impacts fertility. Obesity and excess fat are chief causes of poor fertility. Exercise strengthens the immune system, cardio-respiratory system, improves muscle tone, enhances stamina and detoxifies the body. It reverses ageing too. Exercise will help women over 30 to conceive, deliver and even face the challenges that come with late motherhood."