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How Long Can a Woman Wait?



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by: Bill Stamps

Statistics show more women are putting off marriage and babies in order to focus on education and careers. Stories about Hollywood celebrities having babies in their forties may make that decision even easier. In part two of our series on fertility, Bill Stamps tells us why many of these women may be in for a big surprise when they decide to start a family.

(sound of a clock ticking) Just about every woman will hear this sound at some point in her life...

(sound of a clock ticking) it's the sound of her biological clock.

Unfortunately, by the time some women pay attention, experts say it's too late.

Forty-four year old Amy — who doesn't want us to use her last name — is one of those women. Only Amy didn't put off having a baby on purpose. It's just that she didn't meet the man of her dreams while she was in prime child bearing years. She still remembers some advice a friend gave her when she was younger.

"You're not married. You're not involved in a relationship, but if you ever want to have a child, because your age is starting to click — you need to get somewhere and freeze your eggs. I disregarded it."

By the time Amy met Mr. Right, she was in her mid 30's and that's where the problems begin. Experts say women see Hollywood stars having babies in their early or even late forties and think they have more time on their clock. Big mistake says fertility specialist Randal Dunn.

"I think many women have no real conception about what's available. What's the real possibility for them after age forty. I think that the think if you have enough technology, coupled with the finances, you'll always have success and that is not a true statement."

Amy wasn't even in her forties and she still couldn't get pregnant on her own. Six years of expensive fertility treatments didn't work either. Doctor Dunn says what many women don't know is that most Hollywood stars who give birth in their forties are really using another woman's egg.

"The odds even with fertility treatment in these women who are in their mid-forties is less than one percent for successful treatment using their own eggs."

Last year Amy and her husband decided to try a donated egg. She remembers when they took the home pregnancy test.

"We both quit breathing. We started shaking."

Donor eggs may be the only option for women over forty. The egg comes from a younger woman with healthier eggs and is fertilized with the sperm of the husband. The baby and mother won't share the same DNA, but the woman still carries it for nine months and gives birth.

(sound newborn crying)

Amy now has a two month old girl. I asked her if all the years of fertility treatment was worth it.

"How dare you even ask. Five years of treatment...I'd go ten. I can't believe god gave us this gift. And even in the middle of the night. I cherish it.

Ladies, the clock is ticking.

Bill Stamps, KUHF Houston Public Radio News.

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