

NEW YORK POST

MEN: KEEP A WATCH ON BIOLOGICAL CLOCK

By SARA STEWART

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July 15, 2008 --

NARY a week goes by, it seems, without another fertility advisory for women. One of the more dire in recent memory, an op-ed piece in a Boston paper, exhorted all females older than their early 30s to drop everything and conceive: "Take that career drive and direct it toward mating - your ovaries will not last longer than your career."

But for once, the tables have turned. At last week's annual conference of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology in Barcelona, Spain, much of the bad news was aimed at men.

Turns out baby-minded dudes should be worried about that ticking clock, too. Stephanie Belloc, a researcher from the Eylau Centre for Assisted Reproduction in Paris, discovered that age is a factor in the quality of men's sperm.

A news release from the team reported to have "found that the age of the father was important in pregnancy rates - men over 40 had a negative effect. And, perhaps, more surprisingly, miscarriage rates increased where the father was over 40."

The news puts a devastating spin on the conventional wisdom about older man/younger woman matchups. Tony Randall and Warren Beatty notwithstanding, it turns out that guys *can't* just have a baby whenever. Or, as Belloc more diplomatically put it, "This research has important implications for couples wanting to start a family."

William Ledger, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Sheffield, says the results of the study may have been somewhat overhyped, but that "there does seem to be a core of truth in the data, and men who see fatherhood as important should not wait too long before trying."

Nor, it seems, should they let themselves go. Researchers at the Aberdeen Fertility Center in the United Kingdom, also reporting at the conference, found a link between obesity and lower sperm counts.

"The mechanism for the relationship could be a number of things," said Dr. A. Ghiyath Shayeb in a statement. "Different hormone levels in obese men, simple overheating of the testicles caused by excessive fat in the area, or that the lifestyle and diet that leads to obesity could also lead to poorer semen quality."

Also, women shouldn't be surprised if they can't get knocked up by their stoner husbands/boyfriends. A research team at the University of Buffalo found "abnormal sperm and a lower sperm count" in habitual marijuana smokers.

So, just to clarify, guys: If you're past your early 30s, carrying a few extra pounds or still toking up like you're in college, it's time to panic about parenthood. Just ask women, they'll show you how.

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