

A pregnant pause, for reflection

Put together a healthy happy male and female who both want a baby, add sex, and a hey presto! A baby is supposed to follow as a matter of course. While that may be so for some people, for many others it's a long way from the truth.

Achieving pregnancy is one of those things that is still capable of mystifying our brightest scientists, let alone the two people who may be desperate to have a baby.

Humans are contrary creatures by nature. Even a couple who want a pregnancy and achieve it quickly may still experience some doubts. You might be overjoyed to discover you are pregnant, but rather apprehensive about what this means.

Being pregnant will mean at least a brief break from a career for a woman, and for both partners, a huge life change. And that can be scary.

After all, once you get pregnant, you can't easily change your mind. So it's a good thing to accept that having some negative feelings about the pregnancy is normal.

On the other side of the coin, if a longed-for pregnancy just doesn't seem to be happening, a very different journey is involved. Couples' whole lives become focused on the monthly cycle and every month seems to take a year.

Sex can go from being a wonderfully intimate experience with your partner to a task that must be performed so the woman can conceive.

Every period that arrives involves disappointment, so the partners have to get over their sadness and buoy themselves with the hope that they might achieve it next month. If women feel their husbands are not being supportive, or if the husbands feel there's too much emphasis on getting pregnant, this can cause a few cracks in the relationship.

Trying to get pregnant and not succeeding can make you both cranky, so you need to back off for a while because your relationship is the most important thing.

If the stress involved in trying to get pregnant is too high, it's just not good for your relationship, and it may work against your fertility. People find it hard to get pregnant if they are feeling stressed or anxious.

Sometimes a couple needs to take a break from the intensive baby-making and get back on an even keel. It's one of nature's little jokes that getting pregnant seems easy when you don't want it, but it doesn't happen when you do want it.

With the trend for women to have babies in their 30s, there is the added worry that it might not happen because time is running out. While there is some truth in that, it's important to put it into perspective – if you are thinking "I'm in my early 30s, I only have four years in which to have my family", that can seem like a very short time.

But some women have three children in four years, and looking back, four years was plenty of time in which to have a family. So if you free up your mindset a little, pregnancy is more likely to happen.

The main point is not to let the desire to get pregnant rule your lives. You need to keep working at your relationship in all its facets, not just the sexual mechanics.

Make sure you have time together doing nice things that don't involve baby-making, such as pleasant activities with family and friends. If you are snapping at each other and it becomes overwhelming, seek an experienced counsellor who can help get you back on track.

Guard against getting isolated from each other – talking about your hopes and disappointments is important. Keep the communication lines open and don't forget to value the person you married for who they are, not what they can do in the fertility department.

Survival tips

- Don't let trying for a baby be the only thing in your life
- Remember to have fun times as a couple and with family and friends
- If the stress of baby-making is driving a wedge between you, seek help from a couples counsellor.