

## Clock ticking, but is he sticking?

It seems a cruel joke of nature that the years of female fertility are brief and fleeting, compared with the 50-plus years in which a male has the potential to father children.

But that's the way it is, and many women would identify with the idea of time marching on and the biological clock ticking faster once she is nearing the significant 35-year milestone. But a couple's relationship clock doesn't always coincide around being "ready" and this being "the right time".

The issue of the biological clock versus the relationship clock is common and it's difficult to solve, because there are a lot of intense feelings about it.

Let's jump back to the 1970s, when young women were in the middle of a feminist wave and were determined not to be trapped in white aprons in immaculate kitchens behind the white picket fence.

They rebelled against being like their mothers and aimed to be new women who could have it all: education, travel, a substantial career and a family. Life was an exciting path to be travelled and it was possible to have everything exactly when you wanted it, including babies.

The reality is quite different. Many people thought that as long as you were menstruating you could conceive.

But the truth is that after the age of 35, fertility definitely declines, and this can come as a big shock. With so many things in our materialistic age, if something is broken we either fix it or throw it away and get a new one. You just can't apply that thinking to fertility. It's not something we can control.

The bottom line is that if women leave it too late to try for a baby, it simply might not happen. However, the other side of this dilemma is the situation of the man.

Fifty years ago the most common way to ensure a continuing socially approved sex life for a bloke was to marry and stay married.

Today divorce is far more acceptable, so marriages are not always as long-lived as they once were. And today it's not essential to be in a permanent relationship to ensure you get sex, so the pressure for commitment is different.

And nature's design fault means that men in their 40s have no trouble fathering children, and they may still be an attractive proposition to women.

So this sets up a tension because there seem to be different rules depending on whether you are male or female.

Both genders also face issues of financial security. Last century you often had a job for life, but today the same security doesn't exist.

It's also more difficult to afford a house today than it was 30 years ago, so if you want a house before you have a family, you have some hard decisions ahead of you.

Because financial security is more precarious, we tend to put things off, but if you want a family it may mean relinquishing the idea that you can control most things in your life.

Working out the real priorities can be a fraught business for both partners. Crunch time may well come if she is ready for a baby but he doesn't want to be tied down just yet. Sadly, not every relationship can survive this dilemma. Some women may decide to end it and search for a partner who is happy to take the pregnancy path, while some men will decide it's all too hard and will move on to a different relationship without the baby pressure.

However, if a couple are committed to each other, it's worth taking the time and trouble to honestly communicate feelings to each other, and try to find a way through the differences.

And if you get bogged down or overwhelmed, seek some professional counselling to help you achieve a desirable solution.

## Survival tips

- Fertility declines rapidly after women turn 35
- Partners should share their feelings about wanting (or not wanting) a baby
- If you can't resolve issues around whether to have a baby, get some professional help.