

Advanced Maternal Age: Risks & Realities



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Women are unique in the universal loss of reproductive function at an age long before other vital systems fail. This is critically important as women continue to delay childbearing. As women age, there are important issues for providers in reproductive medicine to consider. The first is how both oocyte quantity and quality change over time and how these changes impact an individual women's chance for successful pregnancy. The potential modifiable and non-modifiable factors that control oocyte quantity and quality will be discussed. The ultimate "driver" of a successful pregnancy is the genetic normality of the embryo available. It's important to understand how to predict this, if there are ways to improve this, and how to select the best embryo for success — as well as the implications of these choices. The role of ovarian stimulation and the potential negative impact of aggressive stimulation should be

appreciated as should the potential risks of embryo freezing and frozen embryo transfer.

Once pregnant, women of advanced age have increased risks with pregnancy. These risks expose both the mother and child to risk including pre-eclampsia, diabetes, pre-term birth, low birth weight, growth restriction and neonatal death. Awareness of these risks and appropriate counseling of patients is critically important. Moving forward there may be opportunities for prevention. However, optimizing the patient's health prior to conception is a crucial consideration of appropriate care and counseling, and may include, at times, advising against conception.

Lastly, advanced age, ovarian aging, and pregnancy complications (particularly hypertensive or disorders of placentation) expose the mother to long-term health risks. This new and evolving area of medicine may put reproductive health providers in an important position to identify women at risk, initiate interventions, and potentially improve pregnancy, neonatal and long-term health for these women and their families. Awareness is a key factor for both provider and patient.