

Q Should we have sex like Cirque du Soleil acrobats?

No, there's no need to contort yourselves – doctors say position has no effect on fertility. Sperm only have a few minutes to swim into your cervical mucus, where they hang out and are released into the uterus over the next few days. Elevating your hips at the time of ejaculation, or doing a headstand once the deed's done, won't up the chances of that happening. Still, feel free to take inspiration from the Kama Sutra if that'll give you jollies.

Q Actor Laura Linney, 50, just gave birth to her first child. So why the fixation on the youth-fertility link?

A Age is the number-one factor for determining fertility, since your number of healthy eggs drops as you age, and the system that releases eggs starts to deteriorate, making ovulation more difficult and less frequent. A study in Human Reproduction found female fertility begins declining at just 27; by 35 a woman's thought to be at "advanced maternal age". "At 35, you're half as fertile as when you

were at 25; at 40 you're half as fertile as when you were 35," according to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in the UK. And yes, Laura Linney's just popped one out – but the stats say that, even with IVF, the chances of having a child in your 40s are slim. "For young couples – under 38 – the success rate of having a child through IVF is 30-40 per cent; for women in their early 40s, it's 15-20 per cent. It gets

closer to zero as they near 45," says IVF specialist, Associate Professor Peter Illingworth. Still, today's baby-making technologies mean many more women are conceiving in their 40s. Figures just released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show a big boost in births for 45-49-year-old women – a record 736 children in 2012, up from the record of 661 in the previous year.

Q When, during my cycle, am I most fertile?

You only have a small window to conceive: about six days. Your most fertile phase starts five days before ovulation and ends about a day afterwards, because his sperm (which can survive for more than 100 hours) needs to be in the upper part of your fallopian tubes when your egg exits your ovary. The trickiest part is trying to figure out when you ovulate – because, even if your menstrual cycle is spot on 28 days, ovulation doesn't necessarily occur at the same time each cycle. An OTC ovulation test kit can tell you when you're about to ovulate, but by then you've missed a few fertile days. What to do? Lukic champions this method for women whose menstrual cycles are 26-32 days: sex every second day from day eight to 19 (day one is the first day of your period). "Having sex in the week before ovulation is what's ideal – the sperm should be there to meet the egg." And act as its welcoming party.

Q Can having acupuncture really help assist with reproduction?

It seems so. For instance, a study in the American Journal of Physiology found repeated acupuncture treatments increase ovulation frequency in patients who were having trouble conceiving due to polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). This also applies to poor ovary function that's unrelated to PCOS. It's been shown to be effective in reducing the symptoms of endometriosis that affect fertility, says Lyttleton. "And clinical trials have demonstrated the benefit of acupuncture to sperm quality – especially when there's low motility [when sperm aren't moving forward correctly] or high numbers of abnormal forms," she adds. **wh**

YOUR

FERTILITY QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q Can stressing about conceiving prevent it?

A Stress less, but mainly so you can enjoy life. Some docs believe there's a link between stress and failing to get pregnant but, so far, no scientific evidence has conclusively proved this. "If we think of countries under bombardment or famine, well, these women are still having babies," points out obstetrician Dr Julie Lukic. So why

do so many people think of stress and infertility as peas in an empty pod? One theory: "Too much emotional or physical stress can lower your progesterone levels, which could in turn interfere with ovulation," says reproductive endocrinologist Dr Sami David. "But we don't know enough to draw easy conclusions about a link." So, for now, the best advice is to chill,

and try not to let the baby-making pressure frazzle you. Try meditation, massage or even acupuncture, which "can raise your endorphin levels and reduce stress hormones, allowing your body and mind to relax immediately," says Jane Lyttleton, clinical director of The Acupuncture IVF Support Clinic.

WORDS: ALICE ELLIS; BESSIE REEPE; MARISA COHEN

Q Can men have babies forever?

No. "Men's fertility declines just like women's, but less rapidly," says Illingworth. "Women make all of their eggs before they're born, so by the time they're in their late 30s and early 40s, they're onto the last of them – and they're not as good quality." With men, it's different: "They make fresh sperm every day of their life, but as they get older, tiny mutations can creep into the sperm and affect the space and function, lessening chance of conception." After age 30, men's testosterone levels decline about one per cent each year, so sperm count can start falling. There are a couple of other signs a man's sperm may need a tune-up, says Lukic. Being overweight (this can lower his testosterone levels), and small or low-hanging testicles (a sign of possible varicose veins, which can cause low sperm counts). Early intervention can treat these problems, and fertility treatments can boost your partner's chances. "We've basically solved male infertility in 99 per cent of cases, thanks to procedures that can isolate the best sperm," says reproductive endocrinologist Dr John Jain. Clever.