

The waiting game

By Catherine Eden.
Photographs by
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Many women are having their first baby later in life. We celebrate four over-40 pregnancies.

Lizette, 39 weeks

LIZETTE WESSELS, 40, DOCTOR

'My daughter, Mieke, was born at 39 weeks, just two days after this picture was taken. I waited until now to have a baby because my husband and I were working overseas and travelling.

I conceived without the help of fertility treatment, had no nausea and felt fine until 27 weeks, when I developed gestational diabetes. I was very distressed and cried for days; my husband and I are both doctors so we were aware of all the risks. The more you know, the more you worry, but I got a grip on myself and managed the condition without medication. I measured my blood sugar level four times a day and controlled it by sticking to a strict diet.

I work in the operating theatre, which involves a lot of standing, so I stopped working at 35 weeks so I could rest. The problem with diabetes is that it makes the baby bigger, but the lungs don't mature as fast. These babies are often delivered at 38 weeks, but I pushed it another week and I'm glad I did, because her lungs were fine, and at 3,8kg she wasn't too big.

Everyone I know was incredibly supportive during my pregnancy. Aside from my anxiety about the diabetes, I have had no concerns about being an older mother. It's more about how you feel and I feel great. I'm already thinking about having another baby quite soon.'

Erica, 32 weeks

ERICA PATZER, 42, HOTELIER

'After living abroad for several years I returned to SA in 2005 with my German partner, Alexander. We were married last year and decided it was time to start a family. I conceived quite easily and I have been fortunate that everything has gone very smoothly: I had no morning sickness or cravings and I have had no complications. I exercise regularly, eat sensibly and, except for a little bit of discomfort that I'm feeling in my back now, I have been comfortable throughout my pregnancy.

We both wanted to know the gender of our baby and we can't wait to meet our son. Not that it matters – we had no preference – but it's great to be prepared and to know that he is healthy and strong. I've elected to have a Caesarean; taking everything into account, I feel it is the safer option for me.

I have had nothing but positive reactions to my pregnancy. My best friend is also pregnant and I know a number of women of a similar age who are having babies. It seems to be the norm for women to have children a bit later today. I'm very pleased about that because it means I have a circle of moms all lined up for companionship and support. I plan to return to my job once we've established a proper routine. We will have to see how things go, of course, but having another child is not out of the question.'



Sandy, 37 weeks

SANDY SILVO, 40, IS THE OWNER OF A CAMPING AND OUTDOOR EQUIPMENT BUSINESS

'My pregnancy took me by surprise. I had given up hope of having a baby – during my 13-year first marriage I had a couple of artificial inseminations, but without success. Gustav, my second husband, has sons aged 25 and 16 from a previous marriage, but he wanted to have a baby with me. We have been together for seven years now.

I managed to conceive once when I was 38, but miscarried at eight weeks. I was devastated and decided to accept that I would never have a child. So when my doctor told me I was three months' pregnant I was amazed! I was not on fertility treatment; it just happened.

The pregnancy has been a walk in the park: so easy, no nausea or discomfort. I have three weeks to go and I've gained less than 7kg. I have stuck to a healthy diet and have felt really well. My only concern has been whether I'll be a good mother. Will I know what to do? Will I be able to share my life with someone after being independent all this time? And will we live to see our son through school and university? I attended antenatal classes and they were a great help. They taught me that I don't have to be a perfect parent; I just have to be good enough.

Friends and family were as surprised as we were, but have been very supportive. It makes it easier knowing that, because we are older, we can afford to give this baby the best. I like luxury and am not one for pain and blood, so I've chosen to have a Caesarean. I feel excited and positive about this new stage in my life.'

Samantha, 38 weeks

SAMANTHA LAGESSE, 40, FINANCIAL MANAGER

'Paul and I married recently but we have been together for nearly seven years. It's a wonderful and committed relationship, but we made a conscious decision to wait to have a child until now. Once we decided to try, I conceived quickly and had an easy and comfortable pregnancy – no nausea, no water retention and no discomfort. In fact, I felt completely energised right to the end. I slept propped up on pillows in the last weeks, but even that didn't bother me. I wanted this baby so much, maybe that had something to do with it. We were both so excited when my pregnancy was confirmed and our adorable daughter Kalea (a Hawaiian word meaning joy and happiness) has brought so much joy to our lives.

I'm not too concerned about being an older mother. We both take good care of ourselves and I am strong and healthy. But there is always a risk, so I didn't tell anyone except for my family until I was four months' pregnant. I was terrified of having an amniocentesis, but it went well and it was a relief to know that everything was normal.

When my friends found out I was pregnant they were thrilled for me. Some of them have been going on at me to have a baby for years and I think they'd given up hope. There was a wonderful reaction: it's amazing how news of a baby generates such love and warmth.

I had a natural birth and within two weeks had lost all the weight I had gained. I'm very keen to have another child soon – I am one of seven children and I know how great it is to have siblings.'



