

# WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO START YOUR FAMILY?



**WE ARE RESPONSIBLE**

**FAMILY TIES . . .** planning your family with your partner means that you will have your child when and where it suits you the best – and makes for a happier, more financially secure house.

**S**O, WHEN is the right time to start a family? There is no right answer to this question, but one thing is certain: it is better for you, your relationship and the child to plan your family with your partner, instead of an unexpected and unplanned pregnancy.

Only you and your partner can decide when the time is right for you, as a couple, to have a child.

And there are some questions that you should think about before making that decision.

**Firstly, are you emotionally ready to have a child?** You and your partner, if you do not already have children, should think about your relationship. Is your relationship close, open and honest? Do you enjoy the kind of relationship that will make sure that your child is raised in a stable, loving family?

It is important to note that having a child puts pressure on the most solid relationship – and having a child to save a struggling relationship is unlikely to achieve that goal. Do you think that your relationship will be able to cope with the stresses and strains of parenthood?

**Then, are you financially ready to become parents?** Raising children is an expensive business – and it never gets cheaper. Feeding and clothing them are basic but expensive needs, and there are many other expenses: the birth, nappies, equipment such as prams and cots, medical costs, babysitting or aftercare, education, toys, outings . . .

Plan your parenthood is by planning ahead – by putting away some money every month before you have your child. Of course, the more money

saved means the easier it will be to carry the financial burden of parenthood.

**Are you and your partner healthy enough?**

Both parents should have a clear idea of their own health status, as this may affect their ability to have a child – and may even indicate future health issues for their child – sometimes health problems run in families.

And while it is physically demanding on any woman to carry a foetus, give birth and breastfeed her baby, both parents should understand that they should be as fit and strong as possible to handle the physical stresses of caring for their child. That means things like eating healthy food, getting exercise and sleeping enough.

Both parents should also know their HIV status

before they start trying to have a child. For starters, they may be in a relationship where one partner is HIV-positive and the other HIV-negative – and should ensure that the chances of HIV transmission are minimised while they are trying to conceive their child.

**How can I wait until the time is right?**

This is the easiest question to answer. By using contraception – condoms, the pill or the injection – you can have your baby when it suits you best.

As a possible parent, you should always think about your child's – and your whole family's – welfare before your own.

By choosing to have your baby at the right time, you are doing just that, and you will give him or her the best possible start in life.

## IT'S A 50-50 THING, SAY MEN . . .

WHEN THEY got married nearly 30 years ago, Steve and his wife sat down and planned their future together.

They wanted to make sure that they were ready to have children, mainly for financial reasons. But they took things a step further and also went for HIV tests – an uncommon practice back then.

“When we found out we were HIV-negative, we went for it,” said Steve, smiling.

The couple had used condoms to prevent pregnancy up to that point and also between having their three children.

Steve said he loves being able to speak openly with his family about matters such as family planning, and they all benefit from it.

“It's nice to be open. Even my children – I teach them about this,” he said.

Gilbert is on his second marriage. He and his first wife didn't discuss planning for their two sons, he said, and probably made things harder for themselves in the process.

“You have to take care of those kids,” he said.

With his second marriage, he and his wife – who also has two sons from a previous relationship – sat down and discussed the way forward.

“We planned, and we were blessed with a daughter,” he said, beaming.

Lazarus is a single man, and has no children – yet. But he said that should he settle down with a partner, family planning will be a discussion they must have.

“To have a baby, you need to think first because things are very expensive. You can't make a baby if you can't support it,” he said.

All three men say that they believe condoms to be the most effective form of preventing pregnancies until the time is right – and they offer protection against HIV.

“Condoms are the best,” Steve said.

Gilbert added that family planning is not the responsibility only of one partner – “Contraception is a 50-50 thing,” he said.

## Ways to prevent pregnancy

DO YOU want to enjoy sex with your partner, without worrying about unplanned pregnancies, HIV and sexually-transmitted infections?

Here are some tips to help you and your partner to decide which way works best for you.

The first thing to do is to sit down with your partner and discuss where your relationship is heading, including whether or not you intend to settle down and have a family.

You should also go for HIV testing so that you can both know your status and make informed decisions about your health.

Birth control has been used for thousands of years but there are modern options which couples can choose:

♥ **The condom:** This is the most effective and cost-efficient way to prevent pregnancy. Condoms also protect against sexually-transmitted infections such as HIV. The most common type of condom is the male condom, but in recent years the female condom – which is inserted into the vagina – has also been successfully introduced. People allergic to the latex rubber can use polyurethane condoms.

♥ **The pill:** The oral contraceptive pill, which is taken daily by women, uses hormones to prevent pregnancy. It was introduced in the 1960s. It is a very effective way to prevent pregnancy, provided the woman takes her pill at the same time every day.

Because the pill uses hormones like oestrogen and progesterone, it can have side-effects such as skin problems, vaginal dryness, weight gain or mood swings. The pill should not be taken by women with certain health conditions, such as diabetes or heart problems, and it's less effective if taken with certain types of medication.

♥ **The morning-after pill:** This is an oral contraceptive treatment that can be taken by a woman within 72 hours of having unprotected sex. It works in the same way as the regular pill and has similar side-effects. It can cause a woman's next period to arrive sooner or later than expected.

♥ **The injection:** The contraceptive injection, given to women, is effective for three months at a time. It is regarded as a highly successful form of birth control. The injection has similar

advantages and disadvantages as the pill, and use should be stopped about six months before trying to have a baby.

♥ **The IUD:** The intrauterine device is a small device, usually made of copper, which is placed inside the woman's uterus and prevents pregnancy. In some cases, IUDs can make a woman experience heavier-than-normal periods.

♥ **The diaphragm:** The diaphragm is a small cup that is placed into the cervix as a barrier to the man's sperm, preventing fertilisation of the woman's egg in the uterus. It is often used in conjunction with a spermicide gel. The diaphragm can be fitted hours before sex but it must be inserted correctly in order to be most effective.

♥ **Abortion:** Abortions have been legal in South Africa since 1994. According to the law, women may ask for and get a free abortion at a government hospital during the first three months of pregnancy. Performed in a proper surgical environment, abortions are safe and quick – illegal or backstreet abortions are very risky and can lead to infections, infertility and even death . . .

## A guy's guide to understanding pregnancy

MORE AND more, men are playing an active role in their partners' pregnancy – but for first-time dads it can be especially difficult knowing where to start.

A woman undergoes big physical changes when she is expecting her baby, and both her physical and emotional wellbeing have an impact on her unborn child. This is when the unconditional love and support of her partner can make all the difference.

The expectant father's role has many forms, and often it is the little things that make the biggest difference.

Firstly, the father should be present during the pregnancy. He is one half of the partnership that has a baby and he should accept

that his new parental responsibilities have already begun.

He should also show an active interest in his partner's pregnancy. That means accompanying her to her medical check-ups and keeping up-to-date with the pregnancy – and making sure that she doesn't have to worry about the medical bills.

It also means attending ante-natal classes with his partner, if they are first-time parents. It makes an enormous difference for the father to learn more about pregnancy, the birthing process, and simple tasks such as being able to bathe or change a baby.

Because pregnant women should not drink alcohol – it can have very serious effects on

the growing foetus – an expectant father can show solidarity with the mother-to-be by also not drinking. He should also not smoke around his pregnant partner.

And he should take steps to carry some of his partner's load during the pregnancy, as she will tire more easily. That includes helping with chores around the home, allowing his partner to put her feet up and rest for at least an hour every day, helping with preparing food and easing her physical discomfort – especially later in the pregnancy – by giving her back or foot-rubs.

Even the simple act of making her a cup of tea tells his partner that he cares for the mother of his child.

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