

FAMILY AT 40

Jessica Hepburn meets Claudia Spahr, who on three occasions in her forties has gone through the joy of becoming a new mother. She is someone who takes hope, holistic thinking and a wholesome attitude to parenting in everything she does, as our exclusive interview reveals.

I met Claudia Spahr, mother of three and author of *Right Time Baby: The Complete Guide to Later Motherhood* one evening in a bar on the Spanish island of Ibiza. She had just finished running three consecutive weeks of retreats at an idyllic location in the north of the island including a 'Fertility Detox' retreat for couples preparing to get pregnant and two 'HolyMama' retreats for mothers and babies.

With so much in the media these days about the risks of leaving motherhood too late, Claudia is a fabulous example of the fact that many women can and do fall pregnant in their early to mid forties and go on to have healthy babies. Her first son was conceived when she was 39 and arrived a month before her 40th birthday. She had another son three years later and her daughter, who is nearly a year old, came along when she was 45. All three children were conceived naturally.

The first question I have to ask her is whether she's an anomaly. How many other women does she know who have given birth to three children in their forties? Whilst she accepts she hasn't encountered many people who have had three babies at the same age as her, she's quick

to tell me that she's met loads of women who have given birth over the age of 40 and reminds me that, statistically speaking, the average age of first time motherhood is on the increase. "I think there's an exaggerated focus on the age argument with regards to a woman's fertility," she says. "There are many other factors in play and I believe that women can go on conceiving right up until the menopause. But you've got to detox your body and your mind to create the right environment for it to happen."

With leading obstetricians like Professor Susan Bewley saying that fertility plummets 10 years before the menopause, and that in terms of pure biology the best time for a woman to have a baby is in her mid twenties, Claudia's comments offer hope to those coming to motherhood later. She is also critical of the growing reliance on IVF as an answer to conception and thinks doctors refer couples to it far too early and unnecessarily. "All the drugs are hard on the body," she continues. "They upset your digestive and immune systems which are closely linked to successful reproduction." I ask her if that's why she thinks IVF has such poor success rates and she immediately replies in the affirmative.



