

# 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.



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It is certainly true to say one of the little discussed things about IVF is that since it was first pioneered in the 1970s, success rates have not massively changed. Roughly two thirds of all cycles are negative and Claudia believes this has a further detrimental effect on women going through it. "If you undergo multiple rounds of unsuccessful IVF you stop trusting your body," she says. "I believe your mindset is incredibly important. Whatever you think affects your body's chemistry, so you've got to believe it can and will happen."

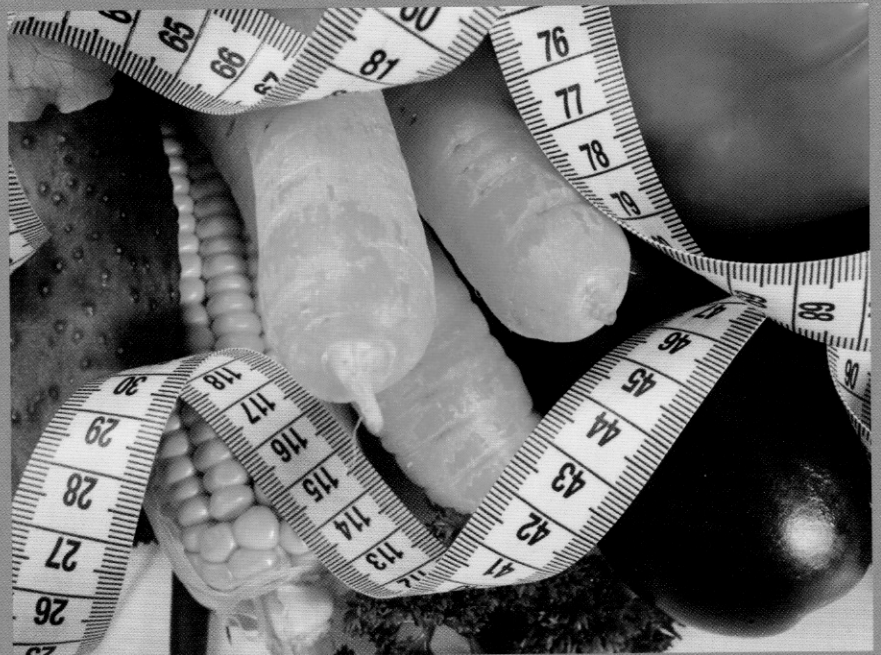
In addition to getting Claudia's top 10 tips for conceiving over the age of 40 - which include drinking plenty of water and making sure you get at least 20 minutes of natural light each day - I'm also keen to know what motherhood as an older woman has been like. Has she encountered any stigma? She says that amongst family and friends she hasn't felt any at all, although doctors had a tendency to treat her as 'high risk' which she resented as it meant certain choices about her antenatal care were taken away. As for strangers, I'm sure they don't even turn their heads because Claudia's looks belie her age. This must be due in part to her holistic, healthy lifestyle, but Claudia believes that women who come to motherhood later often look younger than they are because they're the sort of people who have lived a full and active life which are often the hallmarks of a youthful appearance and attitude.

It's getting late although perhaps not by Spanish standards as the town is still buzzing. Claudia's mobile rings. It's her husband who is back at the villa looking after their three kids. Her 11-month-old has just woken up and is crying in the background. "I'd better go," she says. "As much as I'd love to go on to another bar, those days are gone. But I had plenty of them before I became a mother - that's why later motherhood is so great." And I have to say with an attitude and life like Claudia's, you've got to agree!

## CLAUDIA'S TOP 10 CONCEPTION TIPS

### 1. Detox your life

From processed food to chemical cosmetics, you've got to detox your life. Claudia says this also means getting rid of toxic people, including friends and even doctors. Basically anything and anyone that's not good for your health has got to go. But, don't worry, the odd guilty pleasure is still allowed. Claudia says that she lives by the 80:20 principle. As long as you are healthy 80% of the time, you're doing fine.



### 2. Get your husband or partner fit

Men are too often left out of the fertility thought processes, but recent clinical evidence suggests that male factor problems are much bigger and more prevalent than was previously imagined. You need to get your partner detoxing too, and especially cutting down on drinking and smoking if these are an issue.





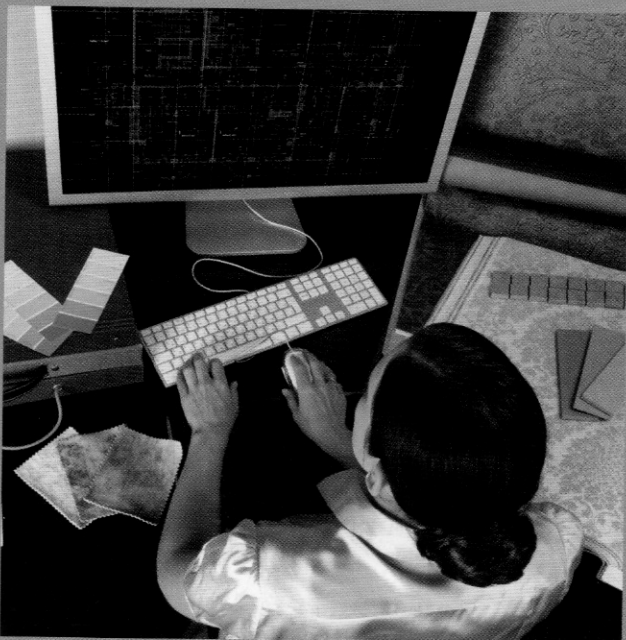
### 3. Reduce your stress levels

Within the medical establishment, the jury's still out when it comes to how much stress affects your fertility, but Claudia strongly recommends you do everything you can to reduce your stress levels. Either way, when was stress ever a good thing? Try to take life at a calmer and more positive pace and enjoy the benefits.



### 4. Sitting is the new smoking

Smoking has long been shunned by doctors and fertility specialists but according to Claudia, "sitting is the new smoking". More and more people are undertaking sedentary jobs which are not conducive to healthy blood flow which she believes is crucial for conception. So if you do an office job or spend most of your day at the computer then make sure you take regular walks and exercise to get fresh, oxygenated blood flowing around the body, especially in the abdominal area.



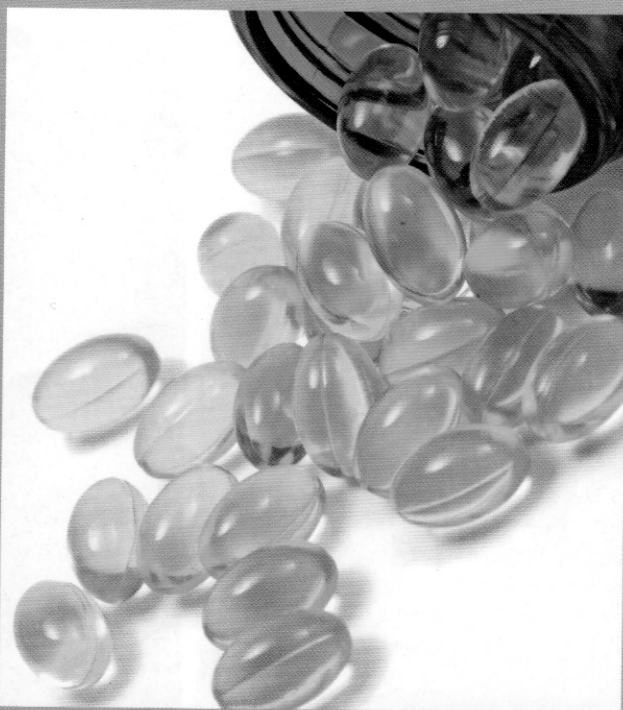
### 5. Get some natural light

Vitamin D is increasingly considered to be important in conception so make sure you get some natural light on your skin each day, especially in the winter. Claudia recommends a minimum of 20 minutes of sunlight a day. Doctors suggest you can support this with a good quality vitamin D supplement as well.



### 6. Regulate your periods

Claudia says that the key to maximising female fertility is to ensure your periods are as regular as possible. If you do have an irregular cycle she recommends taking Evening Primrose Oil in the early part of the month. Regular periods will help you pinpoint when you're most fertile and knowing this is the key to natural conception.



## 7. Drink plenty of water

Get hydrated. Water is the source of life so drink plenty of it.



## 8. Have some complementary therapies

Claudia believes that having complementary therapies like acupuncture, reflexology and massage can support your health from a holistic point of view. While the clinical evidence on whether these therapies directly aid fertility remains limited, there is no doubt that many swear by them and that the relaxation they bring reduces stress and supports your general wellbeing.



## 9. Get some emotional support

Make sure you have plenty of emotional support on your journey to parenthood. It's great to have friends and family you can confide in but it's also very valuable - and sometimes essential - to get professional help in the form of support groups, couples counselling or one-to-one therapy.



## 10. Think positively

Claudia believes a positive mindset is crucial to achieving later motherhood. You've got to let go of all the negative beliefs and suggestions women are fed that it can't and won't happen. All her tips combined will help you feel you are doing everything you can to support your fertility and believe that, like Claudia, you too can achieve a healthy pregnancy and birth.



Claudia's book, *Right Time Baby: The Complete Guide to Later Motherhood* is published by Hay House. Also visit [claudiaspahr.com](http://claudiaspahr.com).