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The first is divorce, after which some men remarry younger women

The second is a general trend toward waiting until midlife - when

and start a second family.

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educational goals have been attained and a career started - before marrying and fathering children.

As for the risks, Khera said the science is not all in but belief within the urological community is that DNA cells weaken with age and damage the genetic information contained therein. The impaired cells are passed on during fertilization. Research is ongoing, he said.

And yet, fathers say, the rewards are well worth the risks.

"The pro side of my situation is that I have wisdom younger people don't have. I have earning ability younger people don't have and I'm able see things better than younger people do," said Paul Mitchell, 51, who subrogates claims for an insurance company in Citrus Heights. Mitchell is dad to Rocky, 8, and Chenice, 3.

That jibes with research author Debbie Mandel has done on this subject. She said older parents often see kids as a higher priority than younger ones, taking time to attend a school play or go on a field trip. Dads in middle age usually have the emotional makeup to handle parenting better than men in their 20s.

"Children benefit from a parent who has a sense of self, who made mistakes and grew and as a result he can help a child grow up happy and confident," Mandel said. "He knows the route."

Additionally, today's older fathers are more physically fit than men in their 40s a generation ago, she said. They can still expend the energy needed to cart around a toddler.

"At the end of the day, I still had energy and everyone else was pooped," Syrovatka said of a recent family trip to San Diego.

Mitchell gets up before dawn to workout and ensure he has the stamina to take care of his two children. Otherwise, he said, he'd be falling asleep on the couch before the kids go to bed.

Mark Rogers is a professor at The Chicago School of Professional Psychology and specializes in family law, domestic relations, and parenting. He also is father to a 21-year-old son, Dillon, from his first marriage and 5-year-old son, Jake, from his current marriage.

"This is an area of interest for me personally but also professionally," he said. "It's one I've wrestled with."

Rogers, 51, said children benefit from parents who are able to mentor more than discipline. That ability often comes with age.

"You can have rich discussions and meaningful bonding with fathers in their later ages," he said. "You can relate on many levels because you've been there."

And yet, being there for the long haul may be biggest question older dads worry over. That is, whether they will live long enough to witness their children's major milestones: high school and college graduation, marriages and the birth of a grandchild.

"I figure I've got to make it to at least 70," Mitchell said.

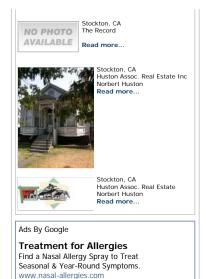
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