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## Research shows men are fathering children at later ages

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Michael McCollum/The Record  
 Jerry Syrovatka is pushed on a swing by his daughter Jasmine, 8, in the park near their Stockton home Saturday morning.

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By **Rick Brewer**  
 Record Staff Writer  
 October 23, 2007 6:00 AM

Jerry Syrovatka says that at 51 he can still run circles around his 8-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son.

But who knows how long that will last?

The Weston Ranch resident is part of a growing phenomenon among baby boomers: men who father children well past the age of 40.

### READING LIST

Some books on the subject of men fathering children after 40:

- "Human Evolution, Reproduction and Mortality," by Lewis Petrinovich
- "Family Man: Fatherhood, Housework and Gender Equity," by Scott Coltrane
- "Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes," by Mark Penn and E. Kinney Zalesne
- "Your Pregnancy Week by Week, Fifth Edition," by Glade B. Curtis and Judith Schuler

"I'm in construction, so I can keep up with the big guys and the little guys," Syrovatka said. "I still got the old spunk in me."

There's a joy to fatherhood no matter when someone has a child, but many Americans are waiting longer. Research shows the percentage of married men having children at 40 or older has nearly tripled over the past two decades, from 5 percent in 1984 to 14 percent in 2004. That includes such famous figures as Rod Stewart and Larry King.

Men older than 40, however, also have a growing list of potential complications to consider before welcoming a new tyke to the fold.

Researchers from Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York found the rate of autistic children is six times higher for men older than 40 than for dads in their 20s. Previous studies by the same researchers linked advanced paternal age with lower intelligence scores and schizophrenia.

Down syndrome cases occur in 60 out of every 10,000 births when both parents are 40 or older. That's six times the national average.

A couple of reasons stand out for older men fathering children, said Dr. Mohit Khera, a professor of urology at Baylor University.

The first is divorce, after which some men remarry younger women and start a second family.

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

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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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