

Why are older parents more likely to have children with autism?

Older men and women are more likely than young ones to have a child with [autism](#), according to multiple studies published in the past decade. Especially when it comes to fathers, this parental-age effect is one of the most consistent findings in the epidemiology of autism.

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Why do older men have higher odds of fathering children with autism? The most prominent hypothesis is that the sperm of older men has [accumulated many spontaneous mutations](#) that the men pass along to their children.

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Some studies have suggested that a woman's chance of having a child with autism also increases steadily with age. The number of de novo mutations in egg cells increases with age, although to a lesser degree than it does in sperm. As with men, women who have autism traits may have children late. However, a comprehensive analysis found that for a woman over age 35, the chance of having a child with autism is [lower than for younger women](#).

That study also suggested that women under age 25 are more likely to have a child with autism than older women. The finding echoed that of several other studies that reported that [teenage mothers](#) also have [increased odds](#) of having a child with autism.

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