

## How old is too old to become a mother?

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Maria del Carmen Bousada, who gave birth to twins in December 2006 at age 66, died Saturday.

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**By:** Nicole Baute Staff reporter, Published on Thu Jul 16 2009

When it comes to motherhood, how old is too old?

Fertility experts and ethicists re-examined that question yesterday after hearing that a 69-year-old Spanish mother died Saturday, leaving behind 2-year-old twins conceived with a younger woman's eggs and donated sperm.

Maria del Carmen Bousada is believed to have been the world's oldest new mother. She gave birth in December 2006, shortly before her 67th birthday, after telling a clinic in Los Angeles she was 55, the facility's maximum age for single women receiving in-vitro fertilization.

Bousada told an interviewer at the time that the Pacific Fertility Center did not ask her for identification, and maintained that because her mother had died at 101, she stood a good chance of living long enough to raise her children.

Dr. Vicken Sahakian, director and owner of the clinic, said Bousada falsified her birth date. He said that he learned of Bousada's deception, "I figured something might happen and wind up being a disaster for these kids." Reports suggest Bousada may have been diagnosed with a tumour shortly after giving birth.

In February, Ranjit Hayer became one of the oldest women to give birth in Canada after having twins, Manjot and Gurpreet, at age 60. She and her husband, Jagir, also 60, sought fertility treatment in Canada, but were turned down, and instead were treated in India. Yesterday a family member said the Hayers and their twins are healthy and happy.

This week in London, 73-year-old Jenny Brown startled the medical world by saying she was seeking in-vitro fertilization. "Any mother can die at any age," said Brown, a former academic who has never had a long-term partner. "I hope to live to 100, but I'll ask one of my younger friends to be a guardian in case."

Dr. Tom Hannam, director of Toronto's Hannam Fertility Centre, said he will not give a woman older than 50 a donor egg. That's common practice in Ontario, but not mandated.

He said the father's age is also a concern: the risk for genetic conditions in a baby such as Down syndrome increases when both parents are older than 35.

Hannam said he confirms a patient's age based on her Ontario health card, but he realizes there is the possibility that information could be inaccurate. He also allows the 50-year mark is arbitrary: Every individual is different, will die at a different point in their life, and will have varying levels of energy.

Hannam said yesterday's sad news only made him feel more resolute about keeping an age limit.

The news also highlighted questions experts have grappled with for years.

Margaret Somerville, founding director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law, uses this principle when considering the role of reproductive technology: "Are we doing something that is impossible in nature or are we repairing nature where it fails?"

Somerville believes it is a big mistake to put the people who want to bear children at the centre of the debate – rather than the children themselves. "Is it fair to the kids to have a mother that's really their grandmother, in terms of age?"

*With files from Associated Press*