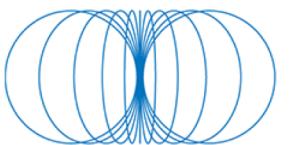




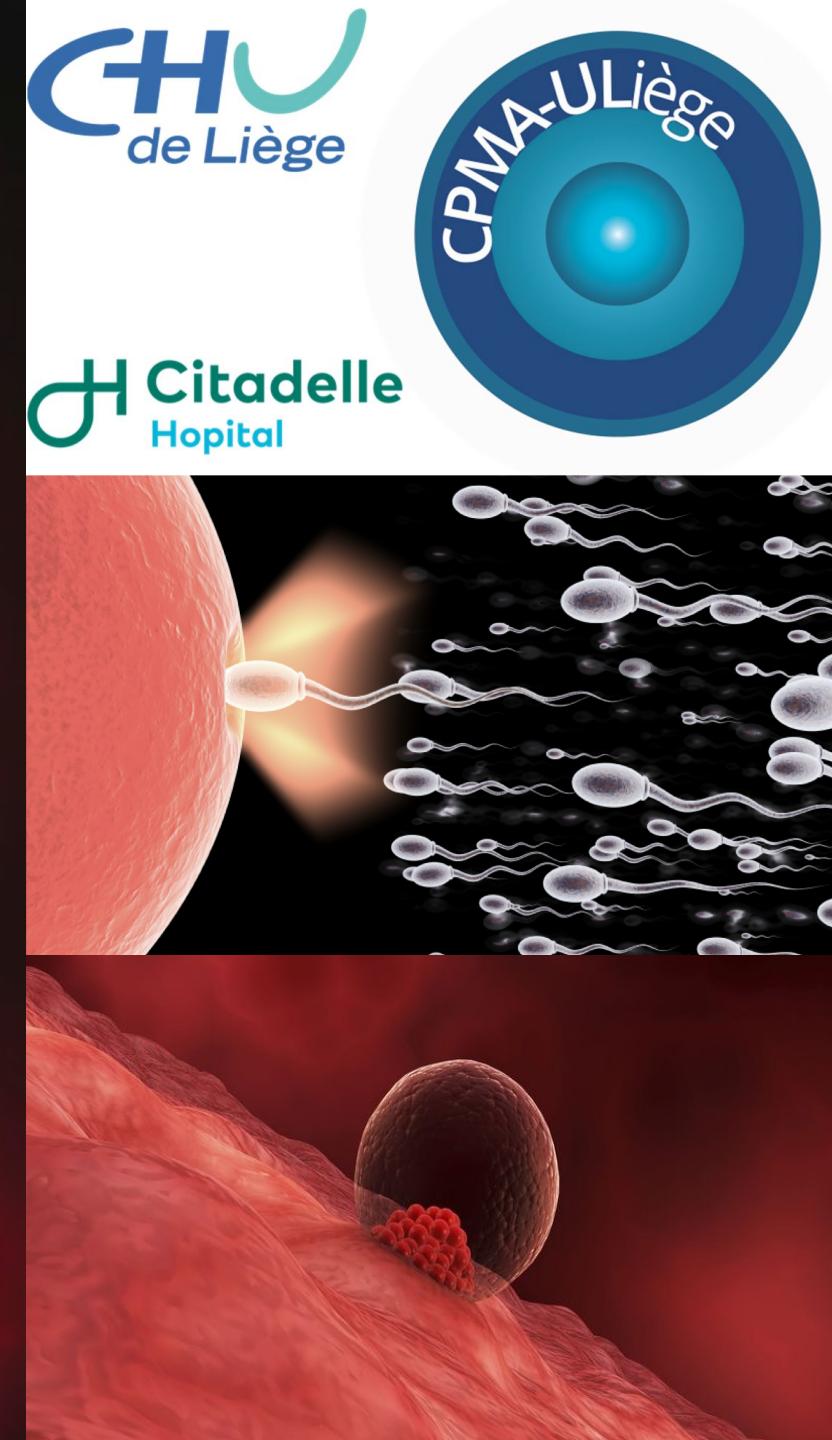
The age, too old, the eggs too few Clinical Perspective

Pr Laurie Henry
CPMA-ULiège



BSRM

Belgian Society for Reproductive Medicine



The age, too old...

Motherhood



Advanced Maternal Age (Geriatric Pregnancy): What to Know

Read More :

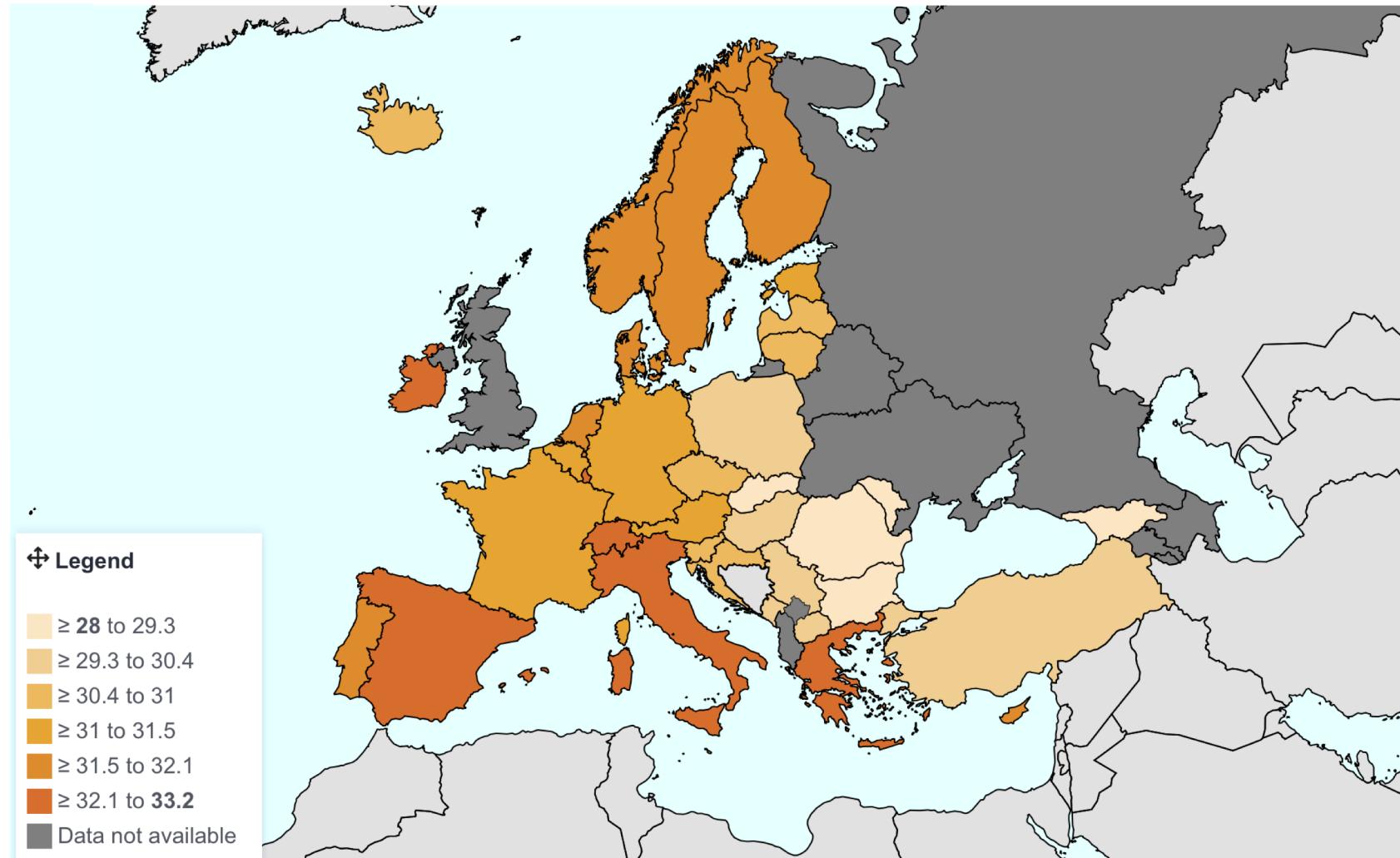


- <https://drritabakshi.in/advanced-maternal-age-pregnancy-over-35/>

The age, too old...

Motherhood

Mean age of women at childbirth (2023): 31.6

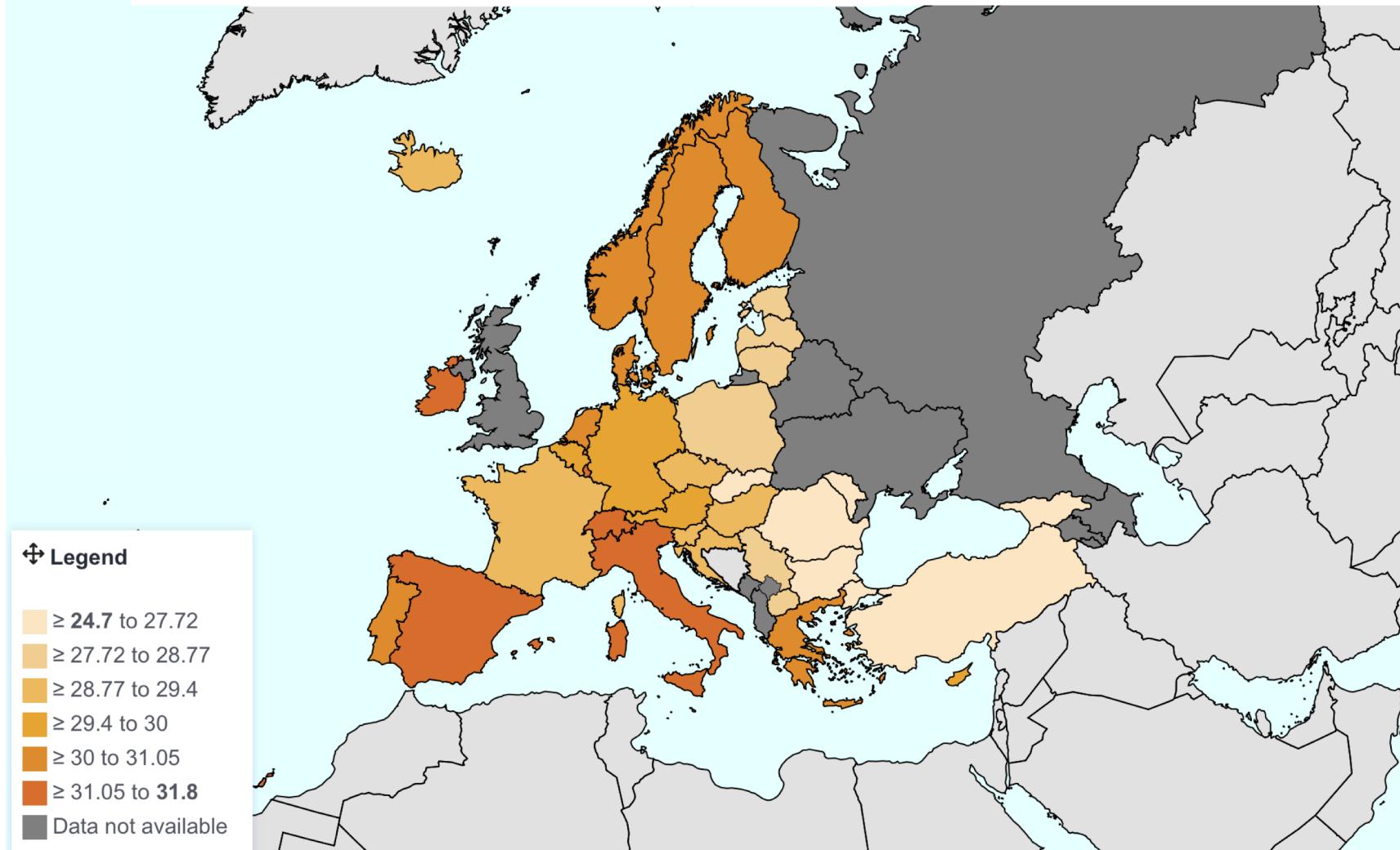


- <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00017/default/map?lang=en>

The age, too old...

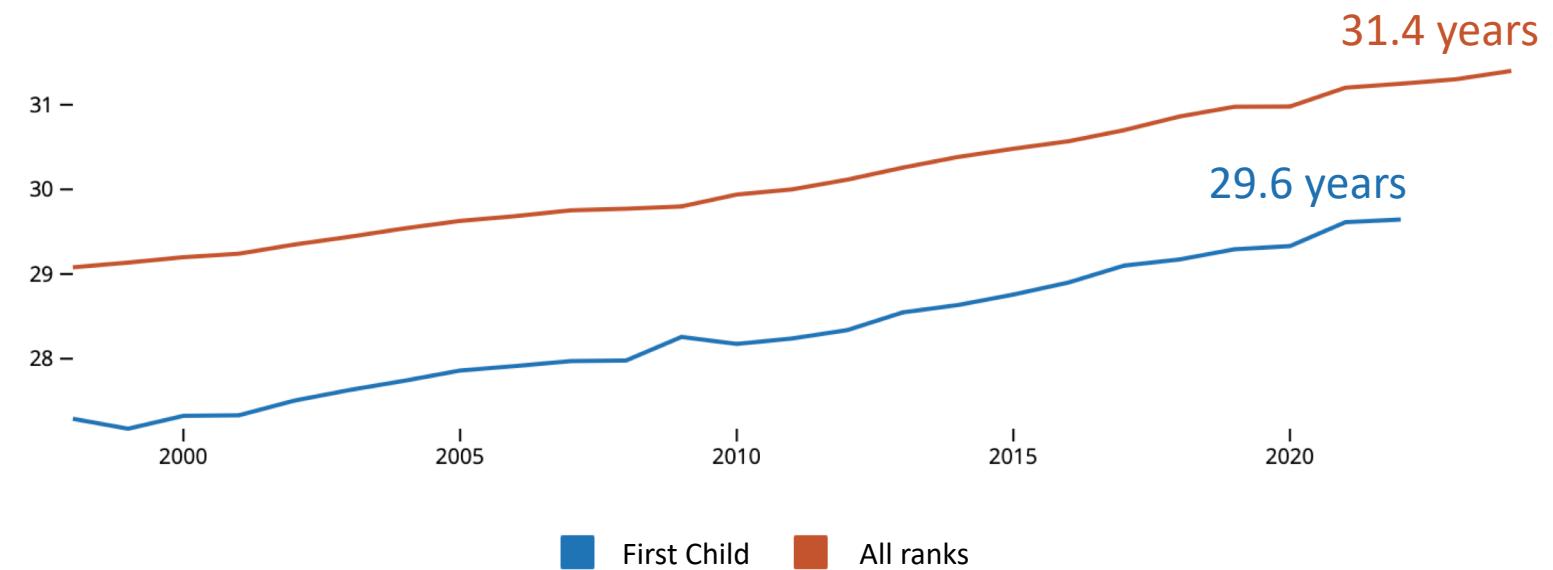
Motherhood

Mean age of women at birth of first child (2023): 30.2

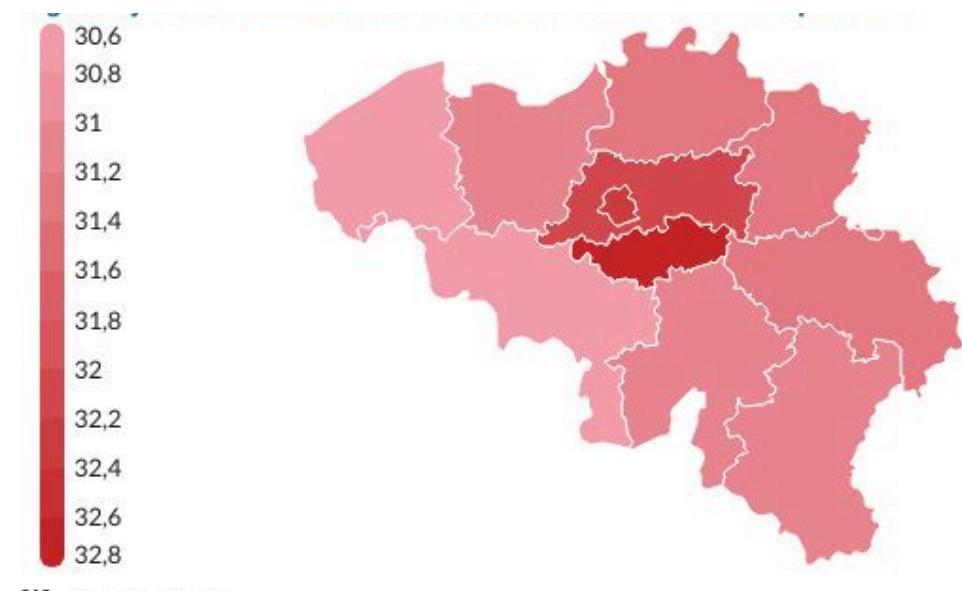


- <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00017/default/map?lang=en>

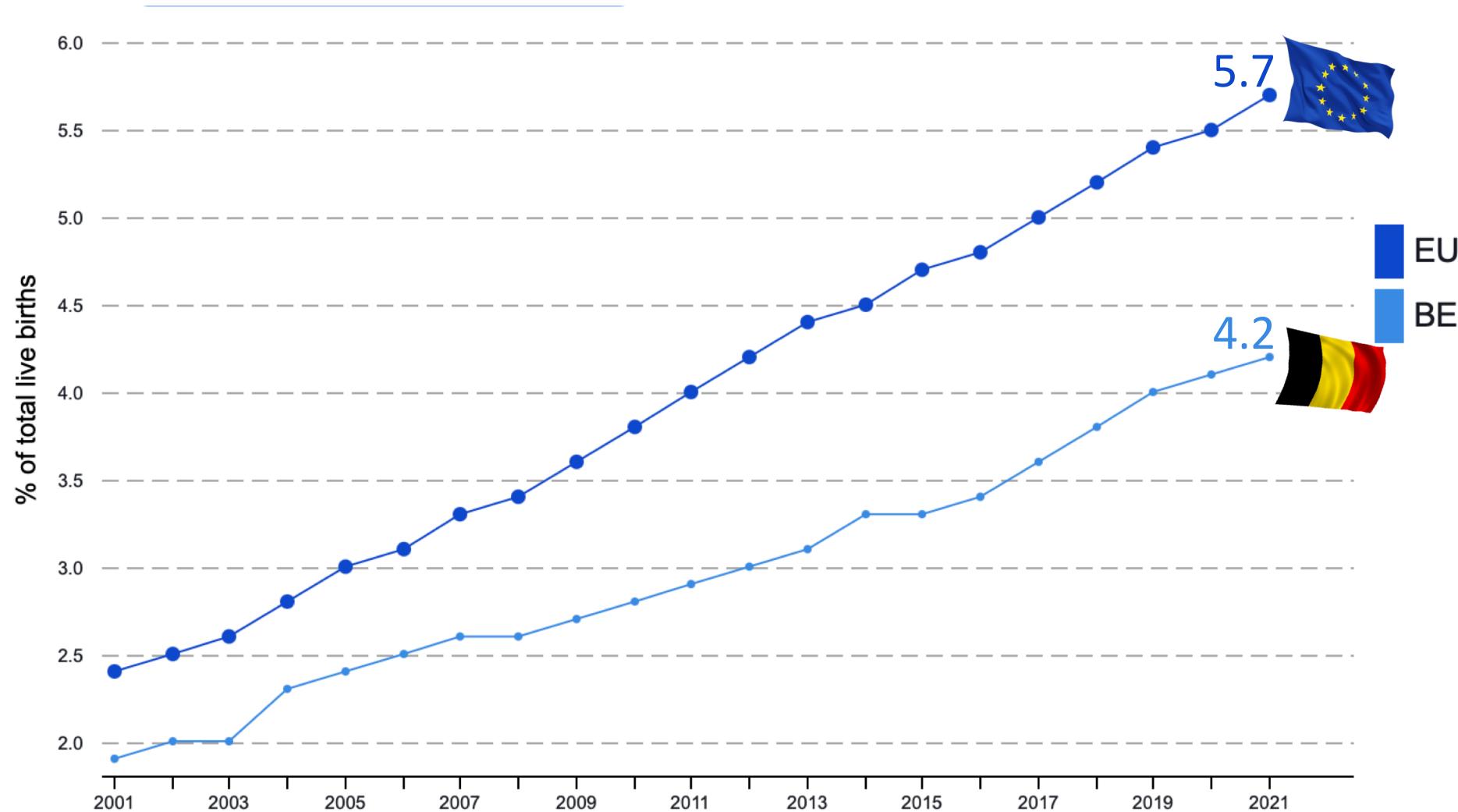
Mean age of women at childbirth and at birth of first child (2024)



Mean age of fathers or co-parents is 34.3 years



Live births from
mothers aged 40
and over
(as % of the total live
births)



- <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2023#ageing-population>

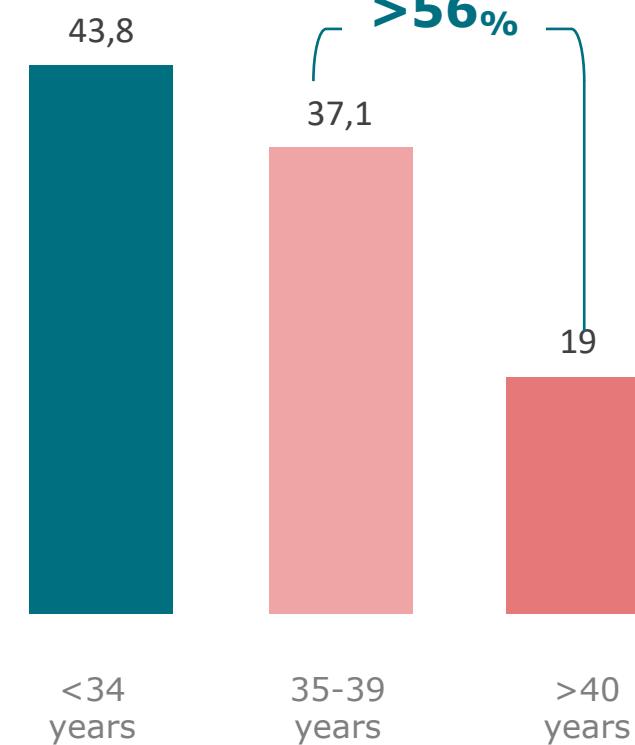
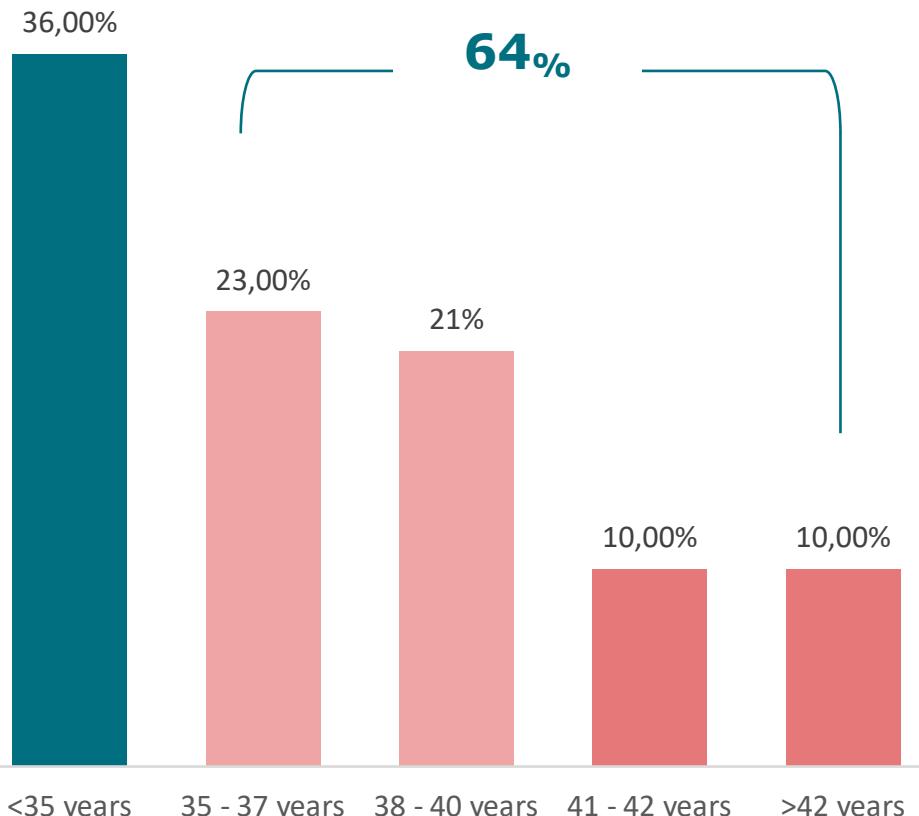
The age, too old...

Fertility Treatments

CDC data for ART (2022)
64% of cycles are
≥ 35 years old



European IVF Monitoring Consortium (EIM) for ESHRE (2019)
56.1% of oocyte pick up are
≥ 35 years old



- <https://www.cdc.gov/art/php/national-summary/index.html>
- European IVF Monitoring Consortium (EIM) for the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE); Smeenk J, Wyns C, De Geyter C, Kupka M, Bergh C, Cuevas Saiz I, De Neubourg D, Rezabek K, Tandler-Schneider A, Rugescu I, Goossens V. ART in Europe, 2019: results generated from European registries by ESHRE†. *Hum Reprod*. 2023 Dec 4;38(12):2321-2338. doi: 10.1093/humrep/dead197

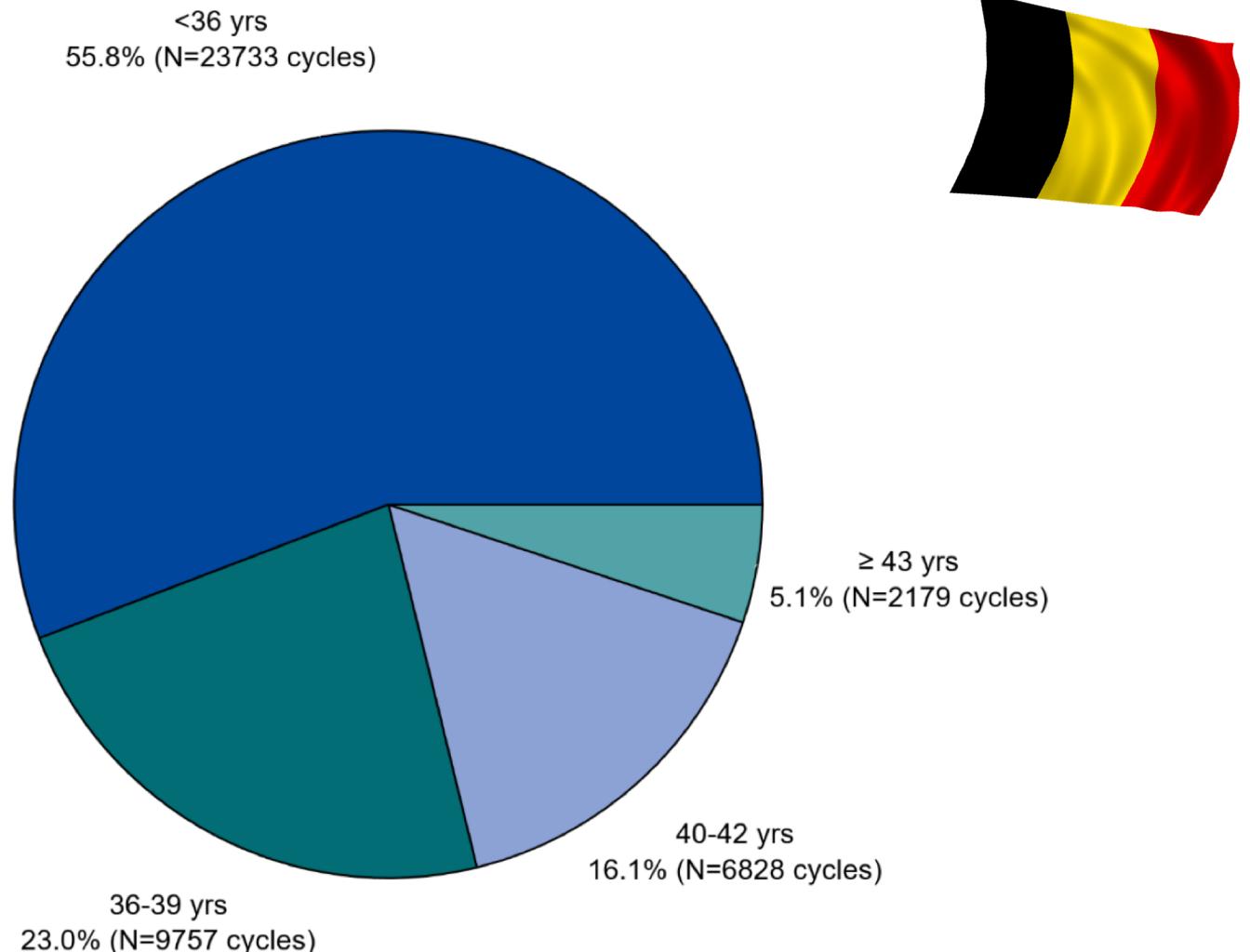


The age, too old...

Fertility Treatments

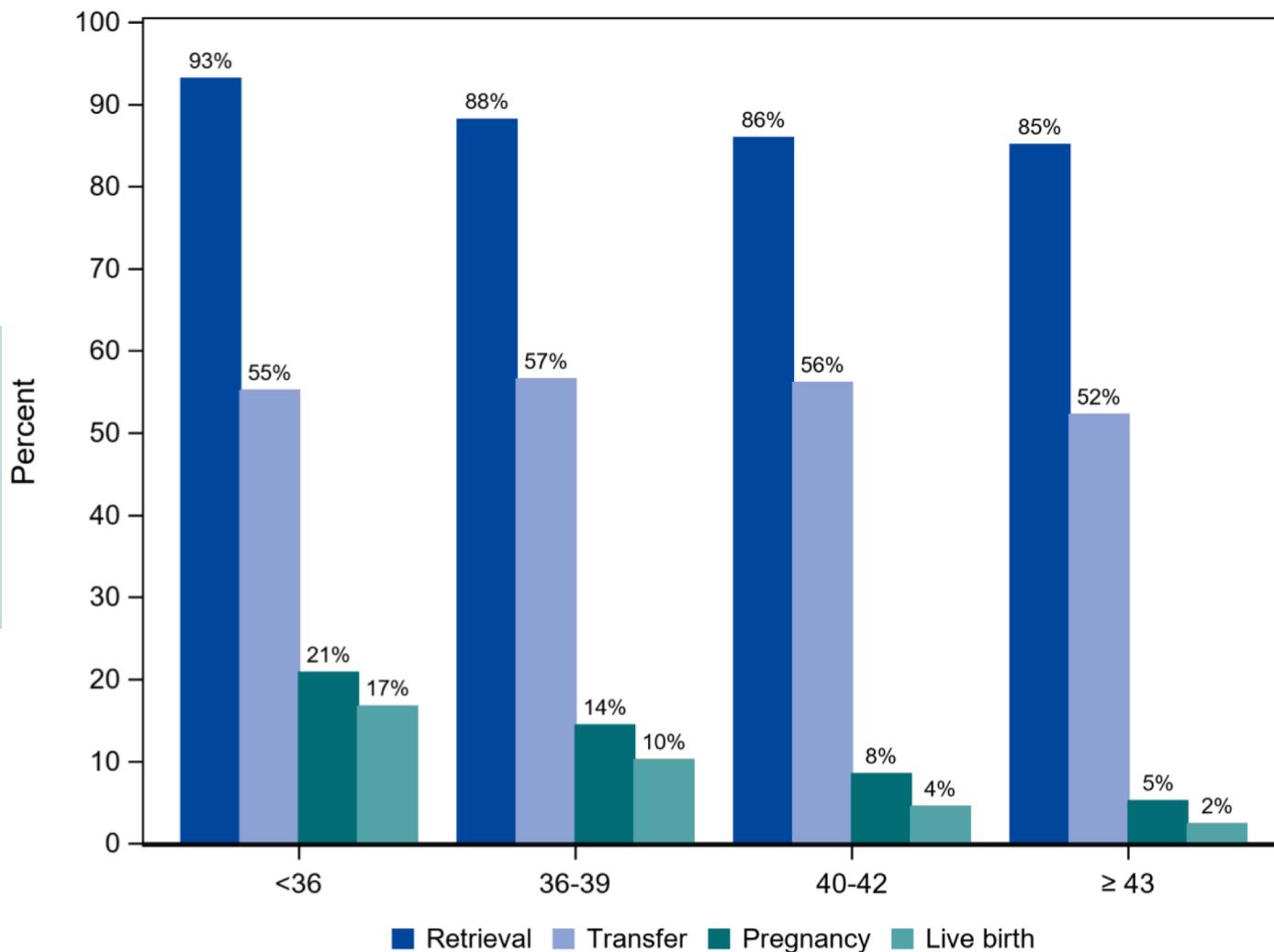
ART use by age group

BELRAP (2021)
44.2% of ART cycles are
≥ 36 years old



- Assisted Reproductive Technology - National Summary Report, Belgium 2021

Outcomes of ART cycles using fresh nondonor eggs or embryos, by stage and age group

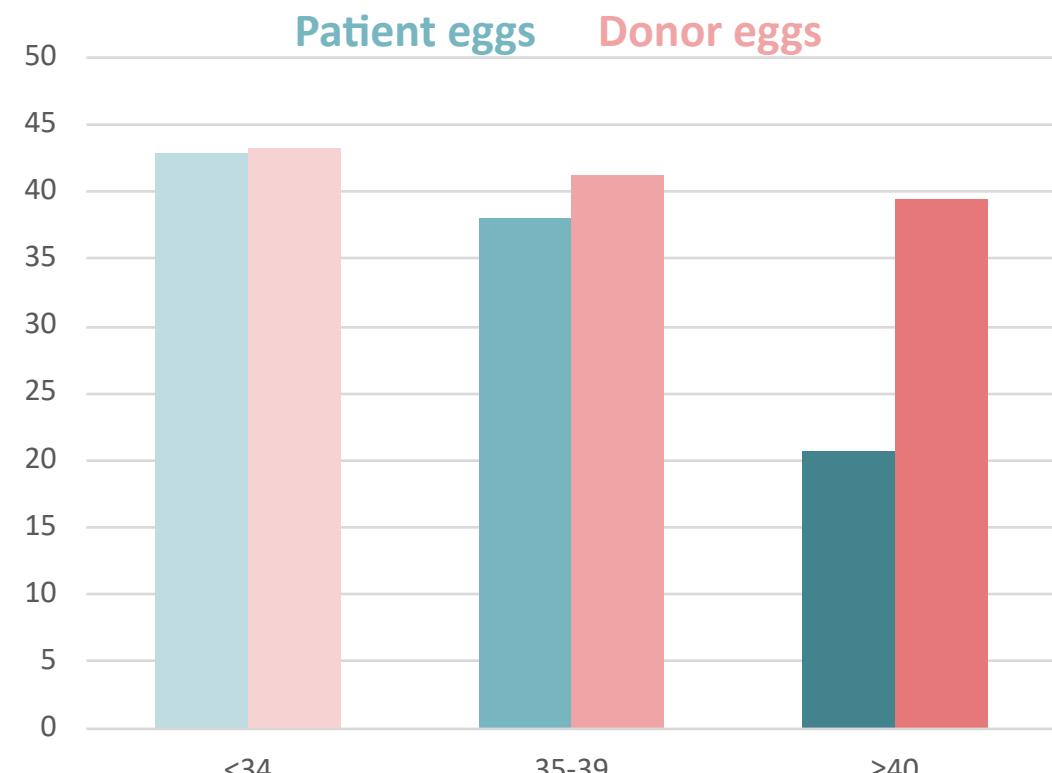


- Assisted Reproductive Technology - National Summary Report, Belgium 2021

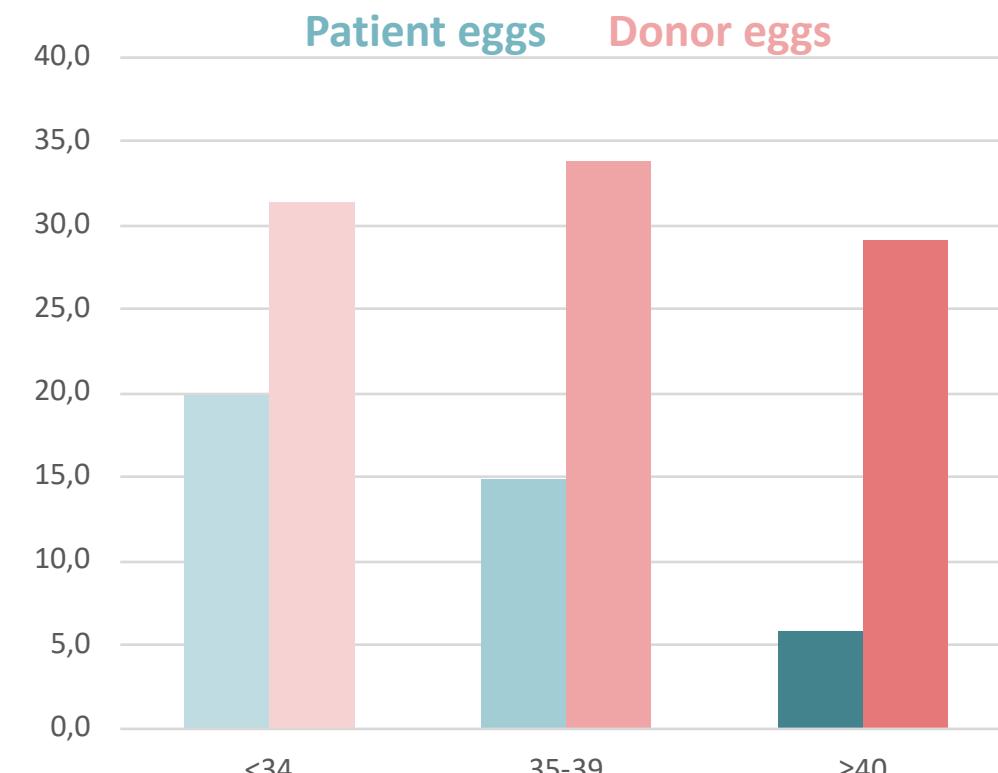
The age, too old...

Fertility Treatments

US: Percentage of Embryo Transfers That Resulted in Live-Birth Delivery (2022)

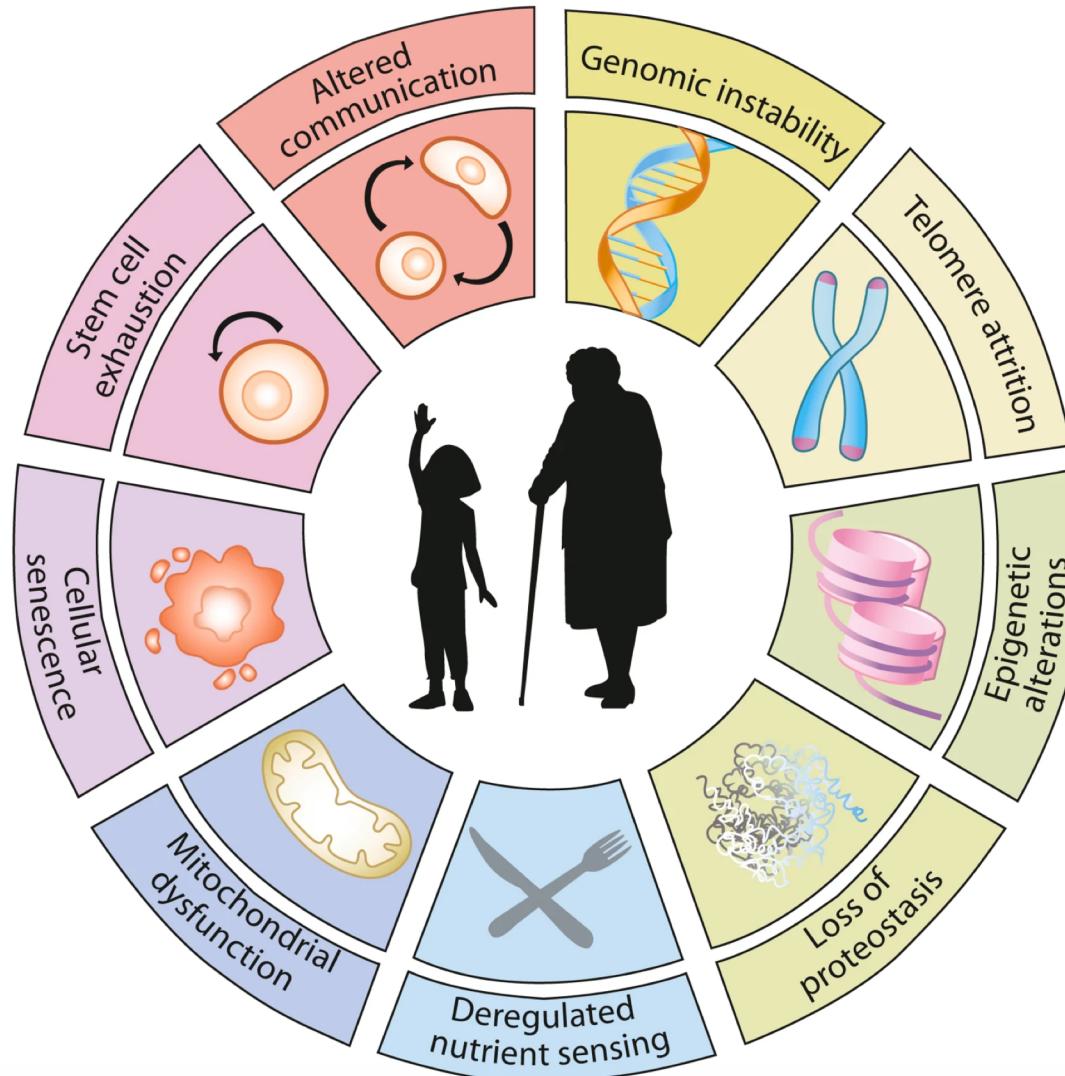


UE: Percentage of IVF/ICSI That Resulted in Live-Birth Delivery (2019)



The age, too old...

Hallmarks of aging



- Yen & Jaffe's Reproductive Endocrinology, Ninth Edition - Modified López-Otín C, Blasco MA, Partridge L, Serrano M, Kroemer G. The hallmarks of aging. *Cell*. 2013;153(6):1194–1217

The age, too old...

Menopausal Transition

STRAW +10
stages

Menarche		FMP (0)										
Stage	-5	-4	-3b	-3a	-2	-1	+1a	+1b	+1c	+2		
Terminology	REPRODUCTIVE					MENOPAUSAL TRANSITION		POSTMENOPAUSE				
	Early	Peak	Late		Early	Late	Early		Late			
						Perimenopause						
Duration	variable				variable	1–3 years	2 years (1+1)	3–6 years	Remaining lifespan			
PRINCIPAL CRITERIA												
Menstrual cycle	Variable to regular	Regular	Regular	Subtle changes in flow/ length	Variable length Persistent ≥7-day difference in length of consecutive cycles	Interval of amenorrhea of ≥60 days						
SUPPORTIVE CRITERIA												
Endocrine FSH AMH Inhibin B			Low Low	Variable* Low Low	↑ Variable* Low Low	↑ >25 IU/L [†] Low Low	↑ Variable Low Low	Stabilizes Very low Very low				
Antral follicle count			Low	Low	Low	Low	Very low	Very low				
DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS												
Symptoms						Vasomotor symptoms Likely	Vasomotor symptoms Most likely	Increasing symptoms of urogenital atrophy				

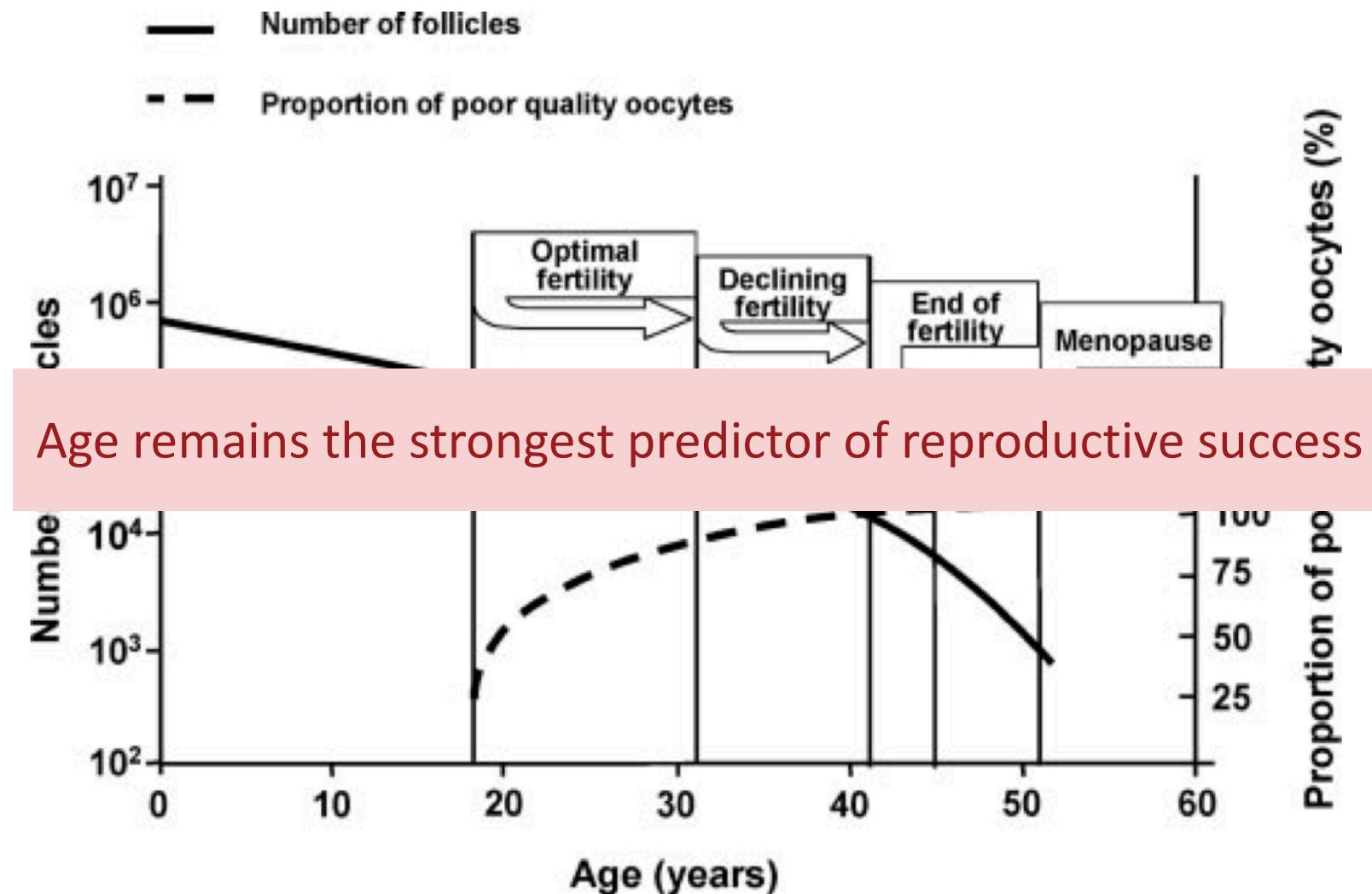
* Blood draw on cycle days 2–5 ↑ = elevated.
† Approximate expected level based on assays using current international pituitary standard.^{67–69}

- Yen & Jaffe's Reproductive Endocrinology, Ninth Edition - Modified from Harlow SD, Gass M, Hall JE, et al. Executive summary of the Stages of Reproductive Aging Workshop + 10: addressing the unfinished agenda of staging reproductive aging. J Clin Endocrinol Metab. 2012;97[4]:1159–1168



The age, too old...

Fertility Decline

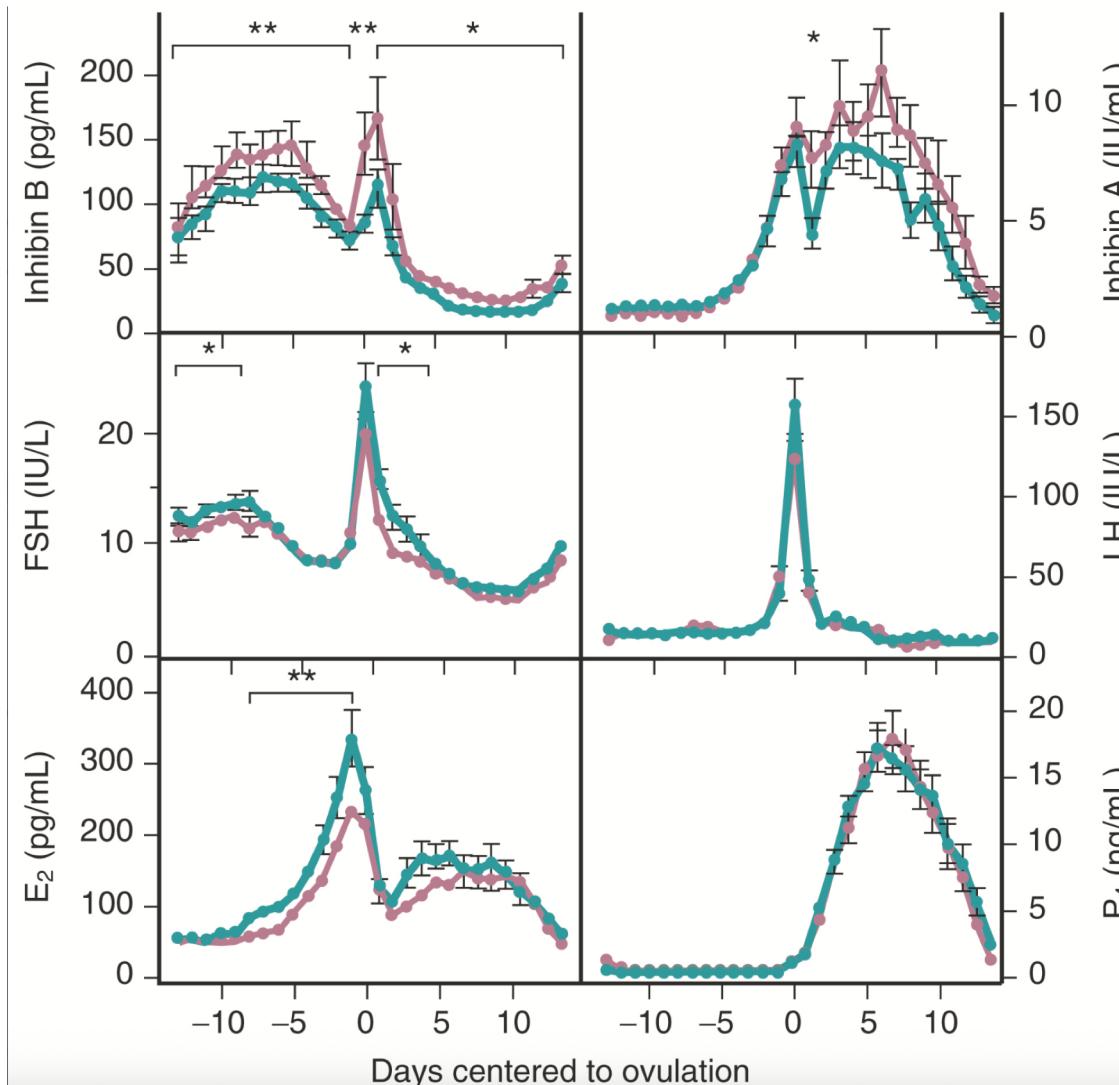


- Broekmans FJ, Soules MR, Fauser BC. Ovarian aging: mechanisms and clinical consequences. *Endocr Rev*. 2009 Aug;30(5):465-93. doi: 10.1210/er.2009-0006

The age, too old...

Hormonal Levels

20 to 34 years old
35 to 46 years old



Key change after 35

Drop in inhibin B → weaker

FSH feedback → early FSH rise

Estradiol

May peak higher mid-cycle

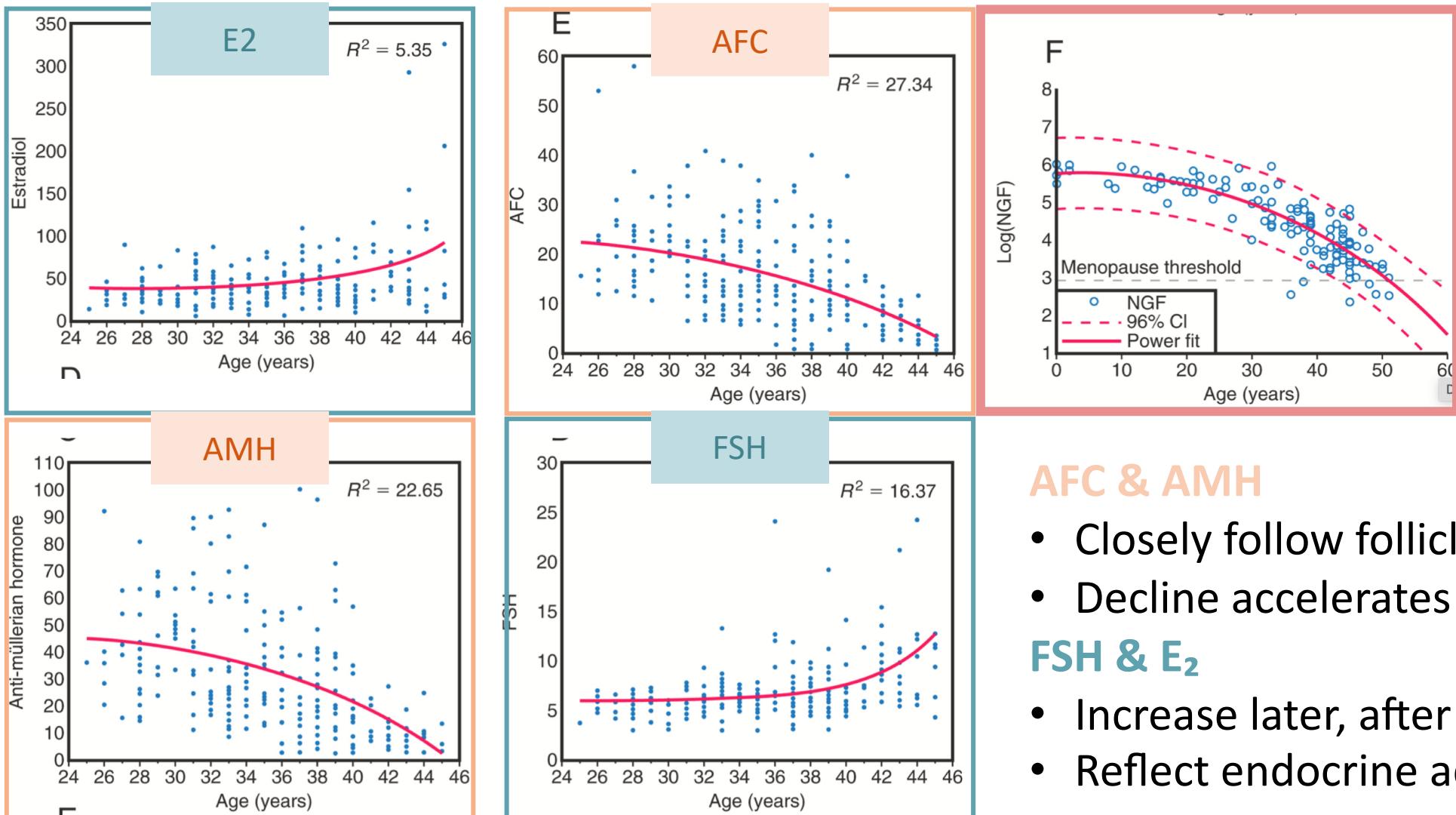
(due to increased FSH

stimulating remaining follicles)

Luteal function

Largely preserved

- Yen & Jaffe's Reproductive Endocrinology, Ninth Edition; Modified from Welt CK, McNicholl DJ, Taylor AE, Hall JE: Female reproductive aging is marked by decreased secretion of dimeric inhibin. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab.* 1999;84:105-111



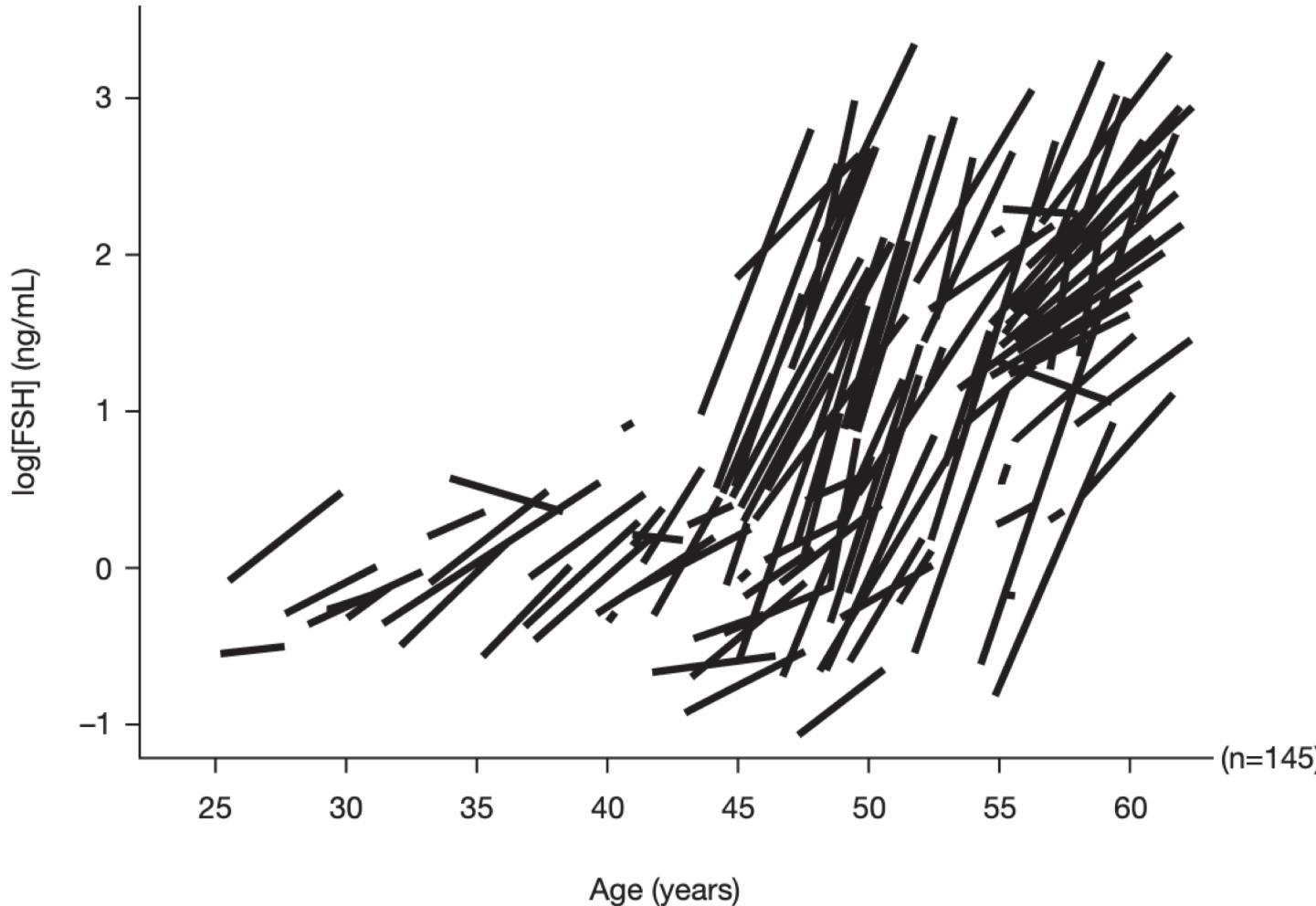
AFC & AMH

- Closely follow follicle loss pattern
- Decline accelerates from mid-30s

FSH & E₂

- Increase later, after major follicle depletion
- Reflect endocrine adaptation

- Yen & Jaffe's Reproductive Endocrinology, Ninth Edition - Modified from Rosen MP, Johnstone E, McCulloch CE, et al. A characterization of the relationship of ovarian reserve markers with age. *Fertil Steril*. 2012;97:238–243.



- **Individual FSH trajectories over time**
- Gradual rise in late 30s–early 40s
- Sharp increase after +/-45 → perimenopausal transition
- Wide variability: early vs late changes

CHU de Liège **CPMA-ULiège**

- Ferrell RJ, O'Connor KA, Holman DJ, Brindle E, Miller RC, Rodriguez G, Simon JA, Mansfield PK, Wood JW, Weinstein M. Monitoring reproductive aging in a 5-year prospective study: aggregate and individual changes in luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone with age. *Menopause*. 2007 Jan-Feb;14(1):29-37. doi: 10.1097/gme.0000227859.50473.20
- Alaviggi C, Humaidan P, Howles CM, Tredway D, Hillier SG. Biological versus chronological ovarian age: implications for assisted reproductive technology. *Reprod Biol Endocrinol*. 2009 Sep 22;7:101. doi: 10.1186/1477-7827-7-101



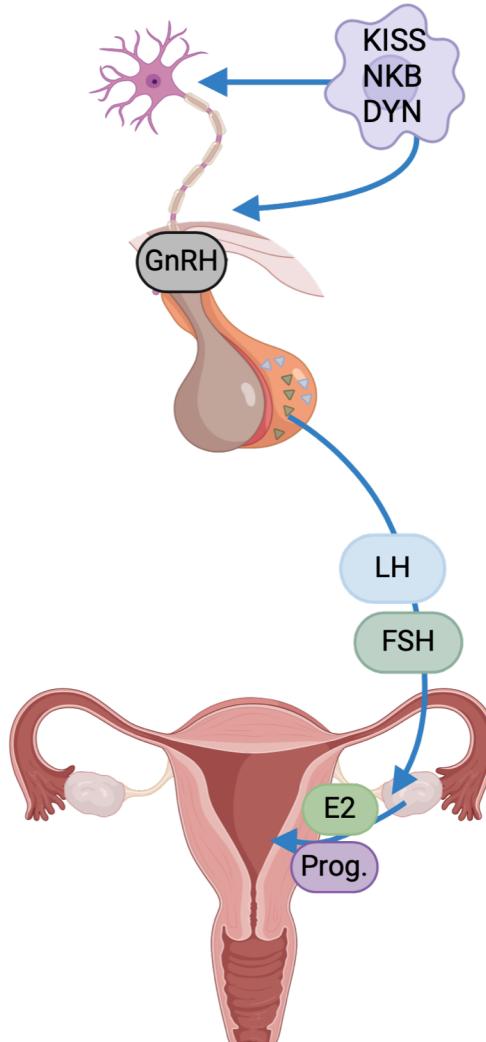
Underlying cause: Dysfunction of the hypothalamic–pituitary–ovarian axis

Neurotransmitter shifts:

- ↓ Glutamate → less excitatory input to GnRH neurons
- ↑ GABA → stronger inhibitory tone

KNDy neurons (kisspeptin, neurokinin B, dynorphin):

- Altered gene expression postmenopause
- Disrupts GnRH pulse generation



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Figure created with BioRender.com

Altered hypothalamic-pituitary signaling: GnRH, LH, FSH secretion changes

FSH

- Rises earlier and more markedly with age
- Isoforms become more glycosylated → lower receptor affinity → reduced biological effectiveness

LH

- Pulses widen, surge amplitude declines
- Isoforms shift to more sialylated, less sulfonated forms → decreased biological activity → impaired steroidogenesis and androgen production

Telomere

- telomere is shortened with a decreased level of telomerase and other telomere-associated protein

Oxidative Stress

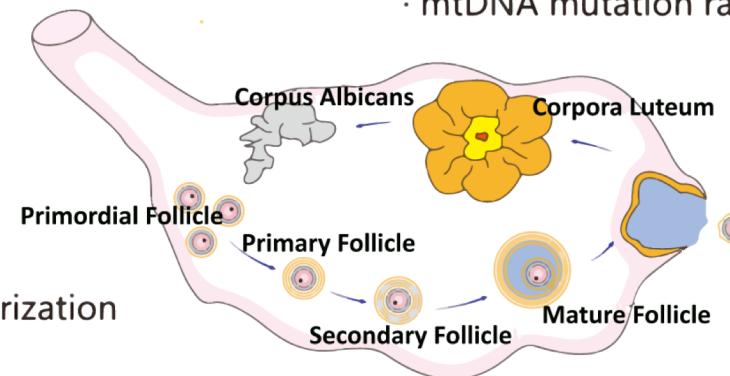
- ROS accumulates with a diminished antioxidants, triggering downstream cascades
- AGEs accumulates, which might compromise vascularization

Apoptosis and Autophagy

- Apoptosis: controversy
- Autophagy: a decrease in autophagic function

Mitochondria

- a decrease in certain material active in mitochondria metabolism
- mtDNA copy number decreases around ovulation and cleavage stage and increases thereafter
- mtDNA mutation rate: controversy



Aneuploidy

- a loss of cohesion in both homologous chromosomes and sister chromatids
- spindle disability
- a lax supervision of meiotic check point

Protein Homeostasis

- accumulation of misfolded, mislocalized and aggregated proteins, inducing UPR

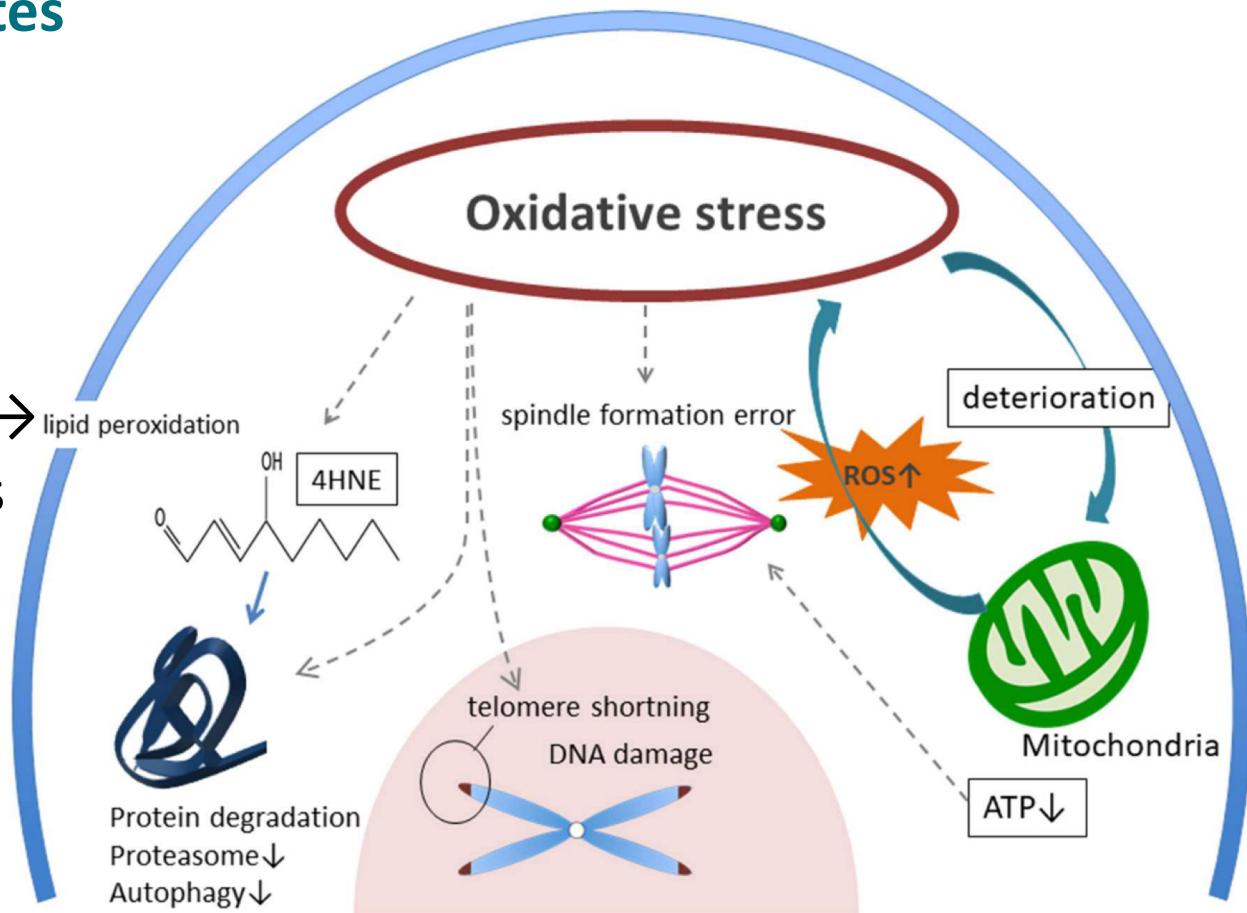
DNA Damage

- DSBs and SSBs accumulate with a decreased expression level of members of repairment pathway

Antioxidant defenses weaken within oocytes

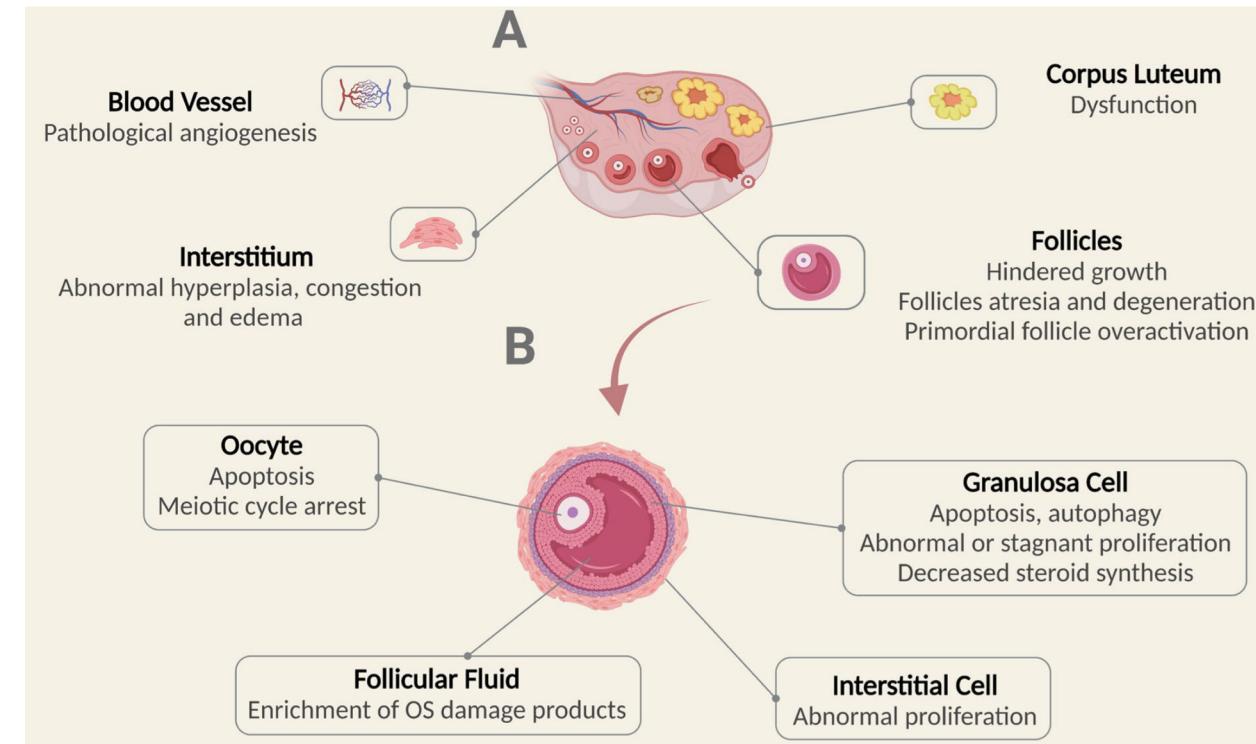
→ ROS accumulation

- Damage to proteasome and autophagy systems
- Creates a hostile follicular environment → impairs oocyte maturation and increases meiotic errors
- Contributes to telomere shortening and amplifies cellular aging processes



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Sasaki H, Hamatani T, Kamijo S, Iwai M, Kobanawa M, Ogawa S, Miyado K, Tanaka M. Impact of Oxidative Stress on Age-Associated Decline in Oocyte Developmental Competence. *Front Endocrinol (Lausanne).* 2019 Nov 22;10:811. doi: 10.3389/fendo.2019.00811

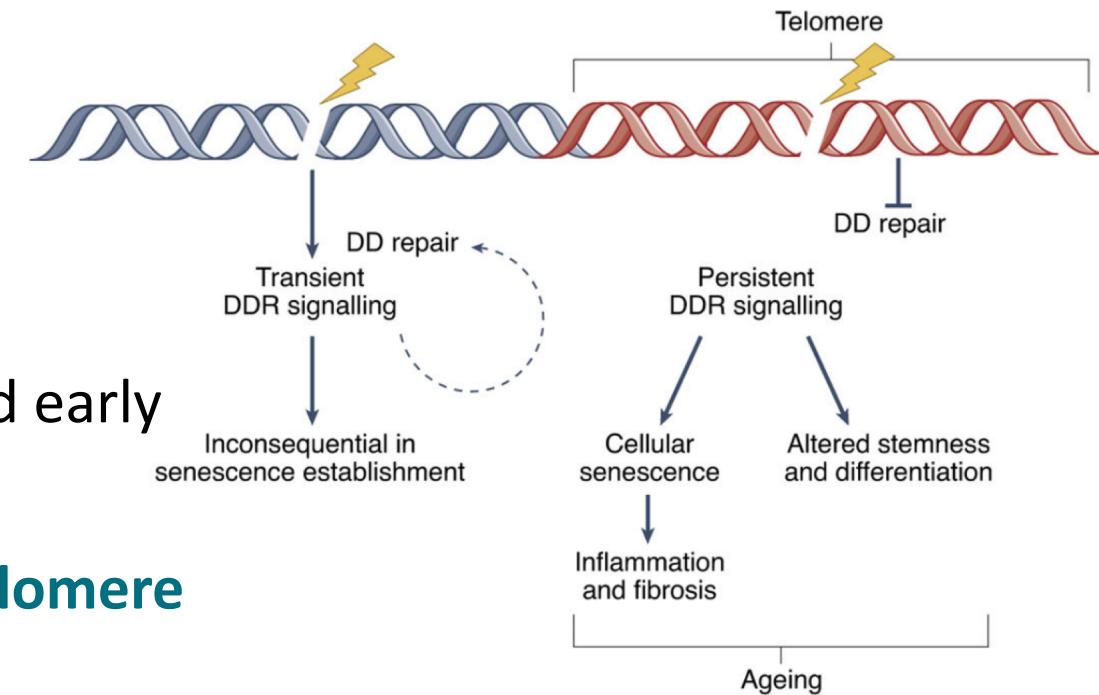
- **Vascular damage:** ROS impair ovarian blood vessels, reducing oxygen and nutrient supply
- **Granulosa cell apoptosis:** Leads to follicular atresia and disrupted hormone production
- **Stromal and interstitial injury:** Alters structural integrity and signaling within the ovary
- **Inflammation cascade:** ROS activate inflammasomes and NF-κB, amplifying chronic inflammation
- **Follicular fluid imbalance:** Increased oxidative products disrupt the microenvironment for oocyte maturation



Oxidative stress transforms the ovary into a hostile environment for follicle development

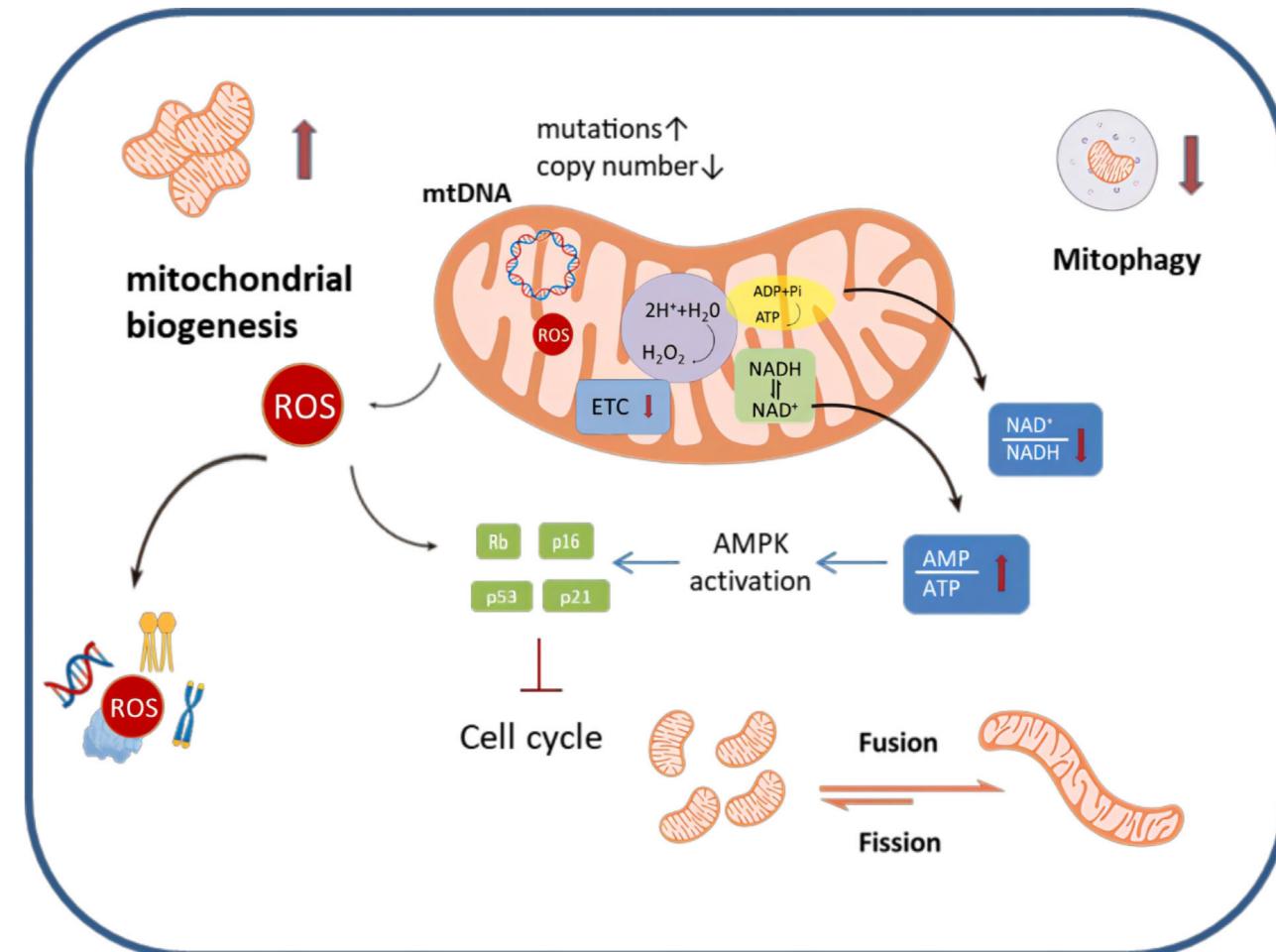


- **Shorter telomeres** and **lower telomerase** in oocytes/granulosa cells
- **Estrogen deficiency** accelerates attrition
- Short telomeres → **higher aneuploidy**, lower implantation
- Linked to **premature ovarian insufficiency** and early infertility
- IVF patients often show **reduced leukocyte telomere length**



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Rossiello F, Jurk D, Passos JF, d'Adda di Fagagna F. Telomere dysfunction in ageing and age-related diseases. *Nat Cell Biol.* 2022 Feb;24(2):135-147. doi: 10.1038/s41556-022-00842-x

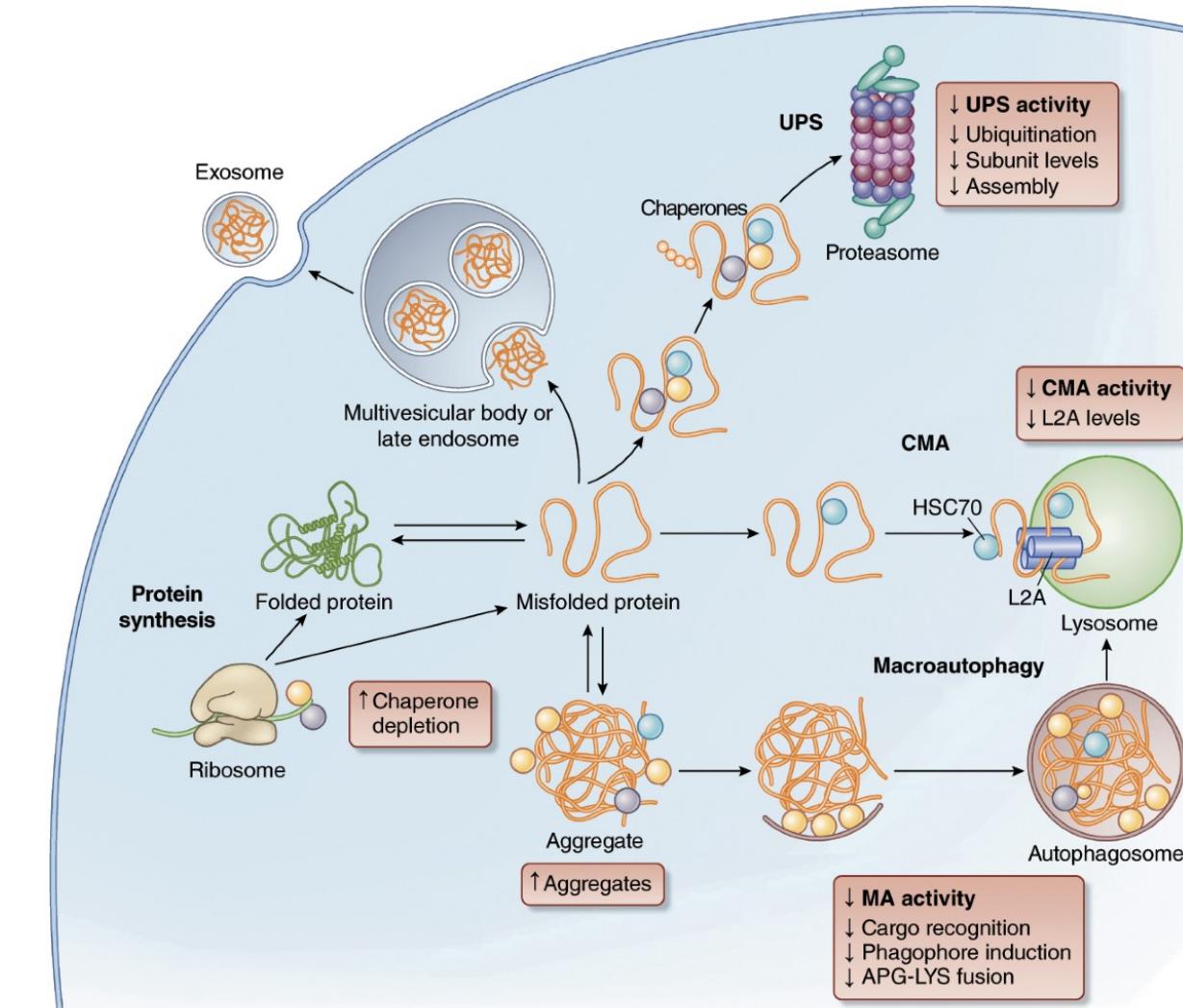
- Decreased **ATP production** → spindle assembly errors
- Modification of **mtDNA** copy number and mutation accumulation
- NAD⁺ decline and **oxidative phosphorylation impairment** → compromise energy balance



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Wang ZH, Wang ZJ, Liu HC, Wang CY, Wang YQ, Yue Y, Zhao C, Wang G, Wan JP. Targeting mitochondria for ovarian aging: new insights into mechanisms and therapeutic potential. *Front Endocrinol (Lausanne)*. 2024 Jun 17;15:1417007. doi: 10.3389/fendo.2024.1417007



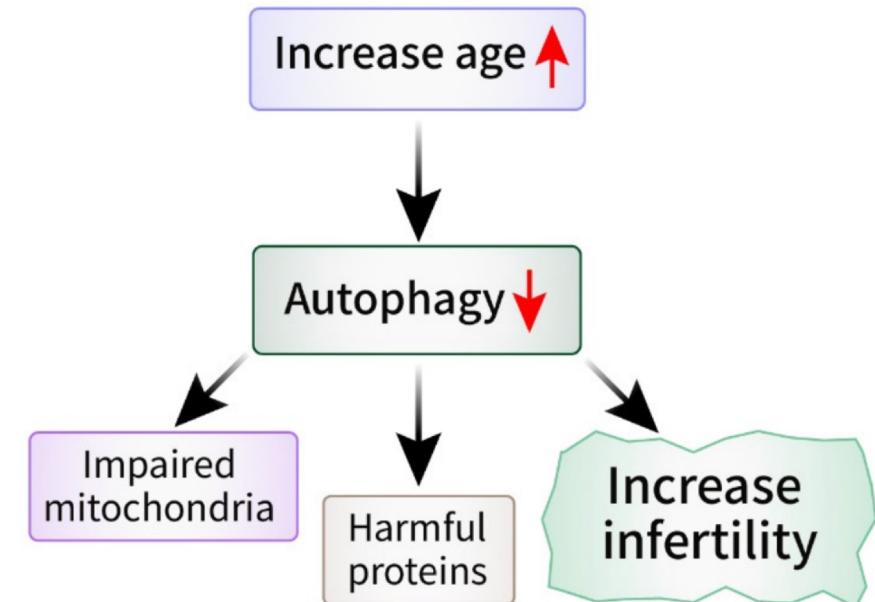
- **ROS** → Disrupts protein quality control (**Impaired proteostasis**)
- Chaperones and proteasomes weaken
- Unfolded protein response & accumulation of **misfolded proteins** (e.g., 4-HNE adducts) → aggregates → impair cellular function and accelerate follicular decline



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Kaushik S, Cuervo AM. Proteostasis and aging. *Nat Med.* 2015 Dec;21(12):1406-15. doi: 10.1038/nm.4001

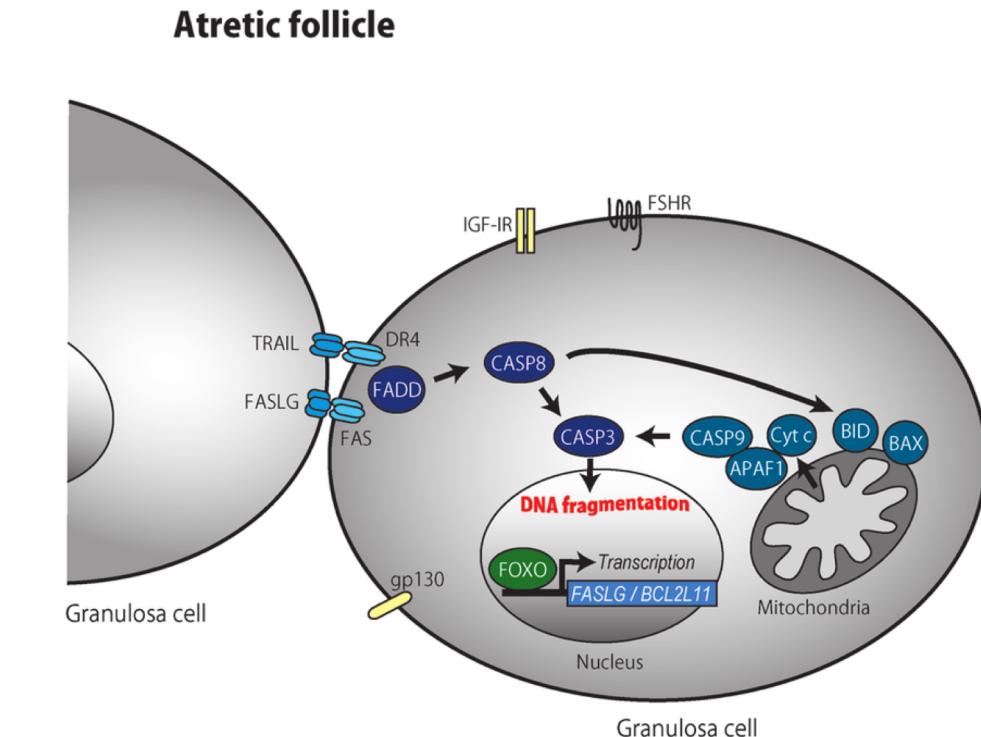


- **Follicle survival** depends on a fine balance between apoptosis and autophagy
- **Autophagy** protects cells by recycling damaged organelles and maintaining homeostasis
- Age → ↓ Activity
 - **Accumulation of dysfunctional mitochondria**
 - **Build-up of altered proteins**
 - **Accelerated ovarian aging**



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Harrath AH, Rahman MA, Bhajan SK, Bishwas AK, Rahman MDH, Alwasel S, Jalouli M, Kang S, Park MN, Kim B. Autophagy and Female Fertility: Mechanisms, Clinical Implications, and Emerging Therapies. *Cells.* 2024 Aug 14;13(16):1354. doi: 10.3390/cells13161354.

- **Apoptosis** → main mechanism eliminating most follicles through atresia
- Age → ↑ Activity
- Granulosa cells show a **unique epigenetic aging pattern** with more age-related methylation changes than other tissues
- **Granulosa cell apoptosis** affects follicle survival



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Matsuda F, Inoue N, Manabe N, Ohkura S. Follicular growth and atresia in mammalian ovaries: regulation by survival and death of granulosa cells. *J Reprod Dev.* 2012;58(1):44-50. doi: 10.1262/jrd.2011-012

- **Mural granulosa cell (MGC) apoptosis** affects follicle survival → marker of poor ovarian response

Comparison of apoptosis of MGCs in different age groups				
Parameters	<30 (n=64)	30-37 (n=70)	≥37 (n = 30)	P value
MGCs early apoptosis rate (%)	0.45 (0.20-1.00)	0.62 (0.25-1.46)	1.30 (0.535-2.40)	<0.0001
MGCs late apoptosis rate (%)	2.08 (0.29-5.67)	2.26 (0.42-4.81)	6.40 (2.33-15.70)	<0.05
MGCs total apoptosis rate (%)	2.85 (0.83-6.42)	2.77 (1.00-6.69)	6.91 (3.92-17.05)	<0.0005

164 women (21–46 years) undergoing IVF cycle, one transfer (fresh or frozen)

- Granulosa cells apoptosis correlated with **age**, worse ovarian response, fewer egg and embryos
- Early apoptosis rate of MGC significantly higher in **non pregnant group**

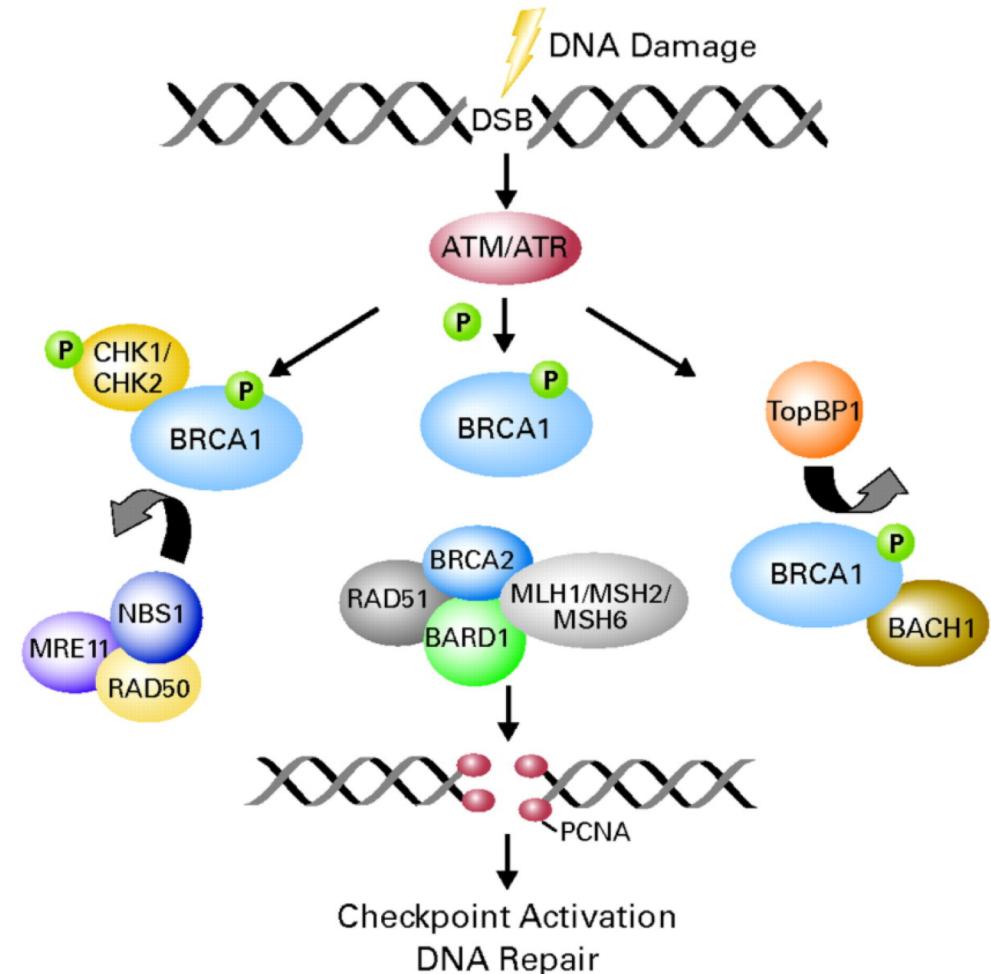
- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Fan Y, Chang Y, Wei L, Chen J, Li J, Goldsmith S, Silber S, Liang X. Apoptosis of mural granulosa cells is increased in women with diminished ovarian reserve. *J Assist Reprod Genet.* 2019 Jun;36(6):1225-1235. doi: 10.1007/s10815-019-01446-5

Primordial follicles remain arrested for decades

→ ↑ **oocyte vulnerability** to ROS and external stressor:

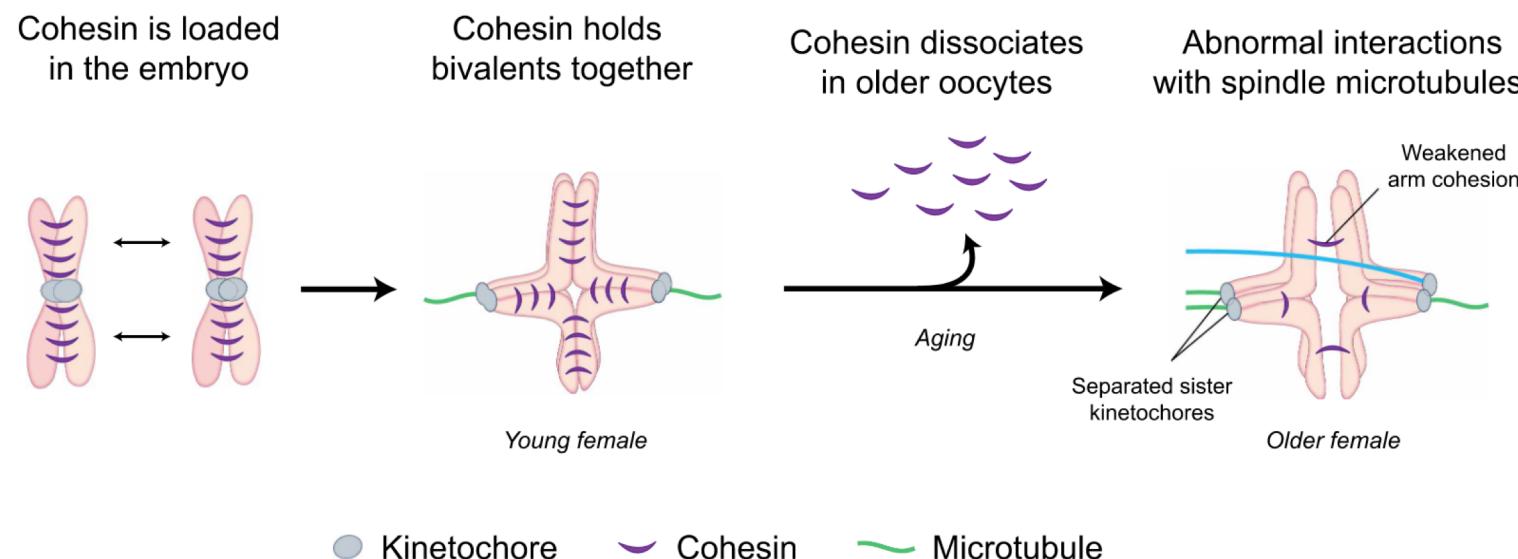
- Accumulation of **double-strand breaks** (DSBs)
- Decline in **homologous recombination repair** (BRCA1, ATM, RAD51)

→ Increased susceptibility to **aneuploidy**

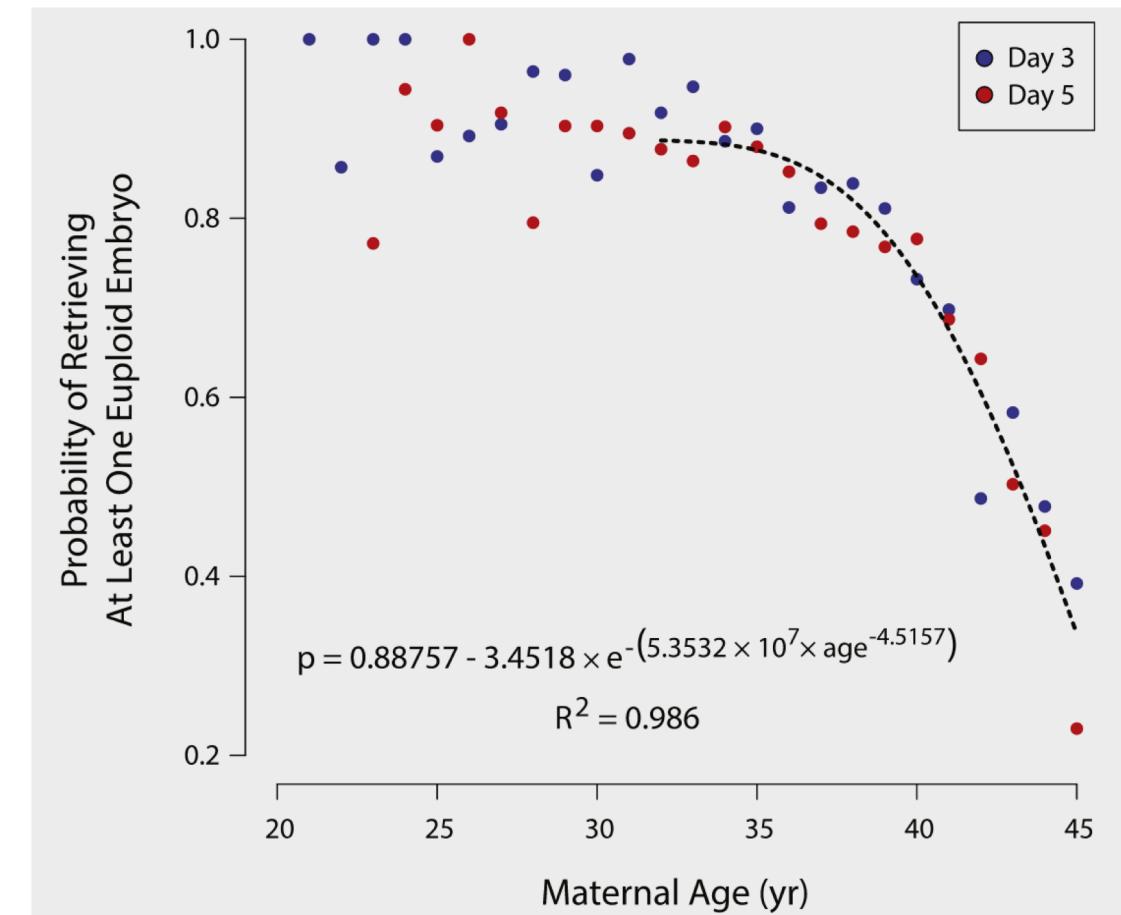
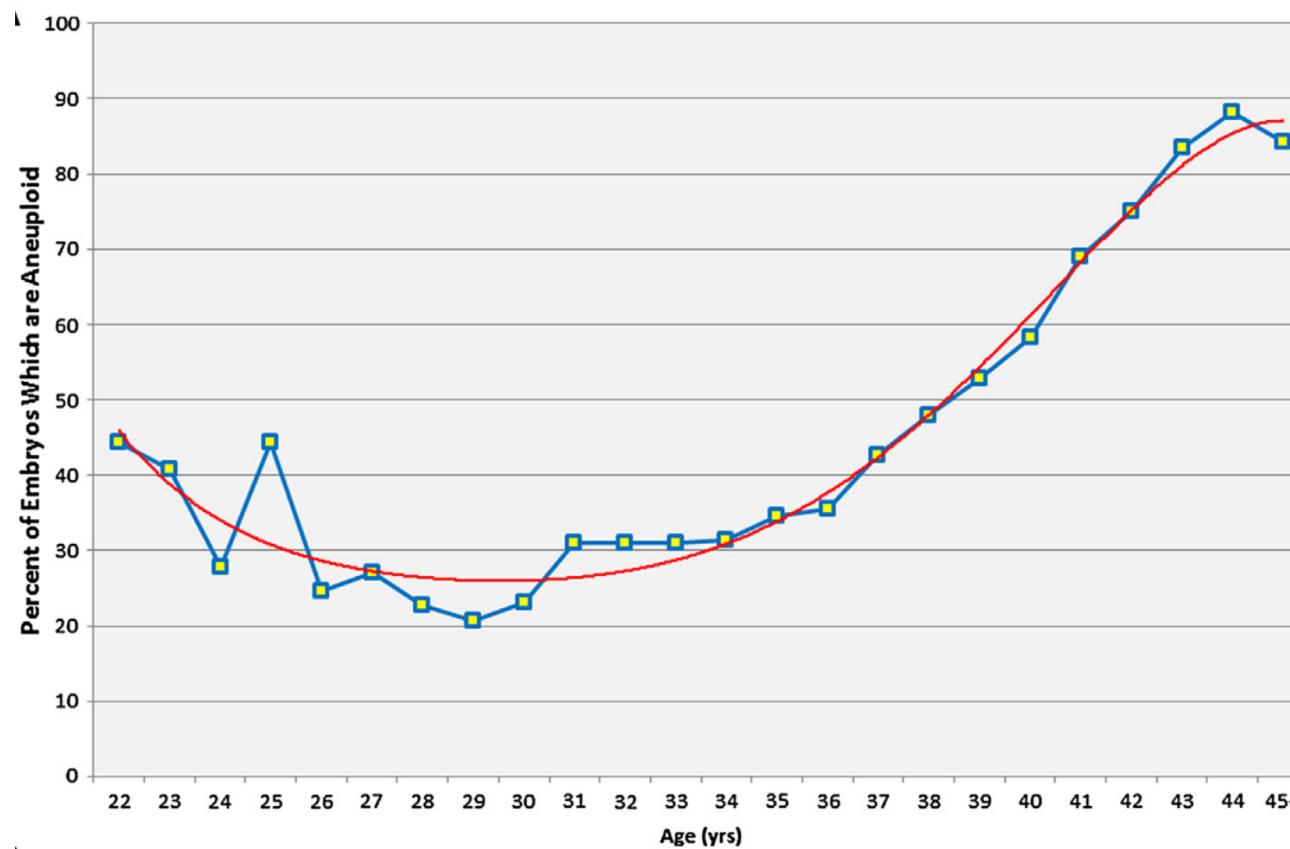


- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Weberpals JI, Clark-Knowles KV, Vanderhyden BC. Sporadic epithelial ovarian cancer: clinical relevance of BRCA1 inhibition in the DNA damage and repair pathway. *J Clin Oncol.* 2008 Jul 1;26(19):3259-67. doi: 10.1200/JCO.2007.11.3902

- **Cohesin loss and spindle instability**
- Cohesin loss with age → weakens chromatid links → premature separation → faulty microtubule attachments
- Combined with spindle defects → segregation errors → poor fertility outcomes in older oocytes



- Wang X, Wang L, Xiang W. Mechanisms of ovarian aging in women: a review. *J Ovarian Res.* 2023 Apr 6;16(1):67. doi: 10.1186/s13048-023-01151-z
- Thomas C, Cavazza T, Schuh M. Aneuploidy in human eggs: contributions of the meiotic spindle. *Biochem Soc Trans.* 2021 Feb 26;49(1):107-118. doi: 10.1042/BST20200043.



- Fransasiak JM, Forman EJ, Hong KH, Werner MD, Upham KM, Treff NR, Scott RT Jr. The nature of aneuploidy with increasing age of the female partner: a review of 15,169 consecutive trophectoderm biopsies evaluated with comprehensive chromosomal screening. *Fertil Steril*. 2014
- Demko ZP, Simon AL, McCoy RC, Petrov DA, Rabinowitz M. Effects of maternal age on euploidy rates in a large cohort of embryos analyzed with 24-chromosome single-nucleotide polymorphism-based preimplantation genetic screening. *Fertil Steril*. 2016 May;105(5):1307-1313. doi: 10.1016/j.fertnstert.2016.01.025

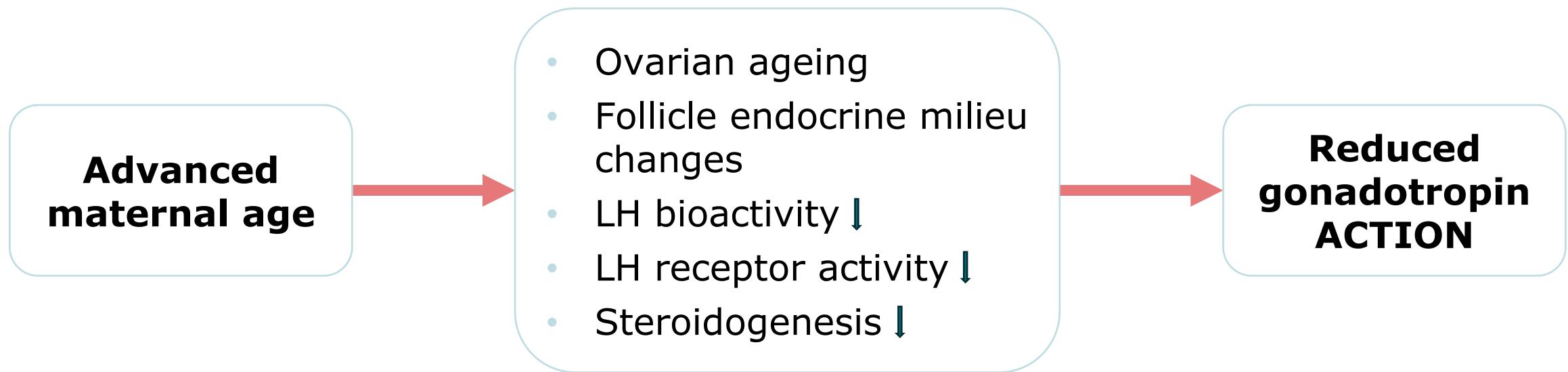


A heat-map presenting the number of frozen mature oocytes by age and percentile

Age (Years)	Centiles												
	5	10	20	25	30	40	50	60	70	75	80	90	95
30	8	9	11	12	13	14	15	17	19	20	21	25	28
31	6	7	9	10	10	12	13	14	16	17	19	23	26
32	5	6	8	8	9	10	12	13	15	16	18	22	26
33	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	13	15	16	17	22	26
34	5	6	7	8	8	10	11	13	15	16	18	23	28
35	4	5	7	7	8	9	11	12	14	16	17	22	28
36	4	4	6	6	7	8	10	11	13	15	16	21	27
37	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	10	12	13	15	20	26
38	2	3	4	5	5	6	8	9	11	12	14	19	25
39	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	10	12	13	18	23
40	2	2	3	4	4	5	6	8	10	11	12	18	23
41	1	2	3	3	4	5	6	7	9	11	12	18	25

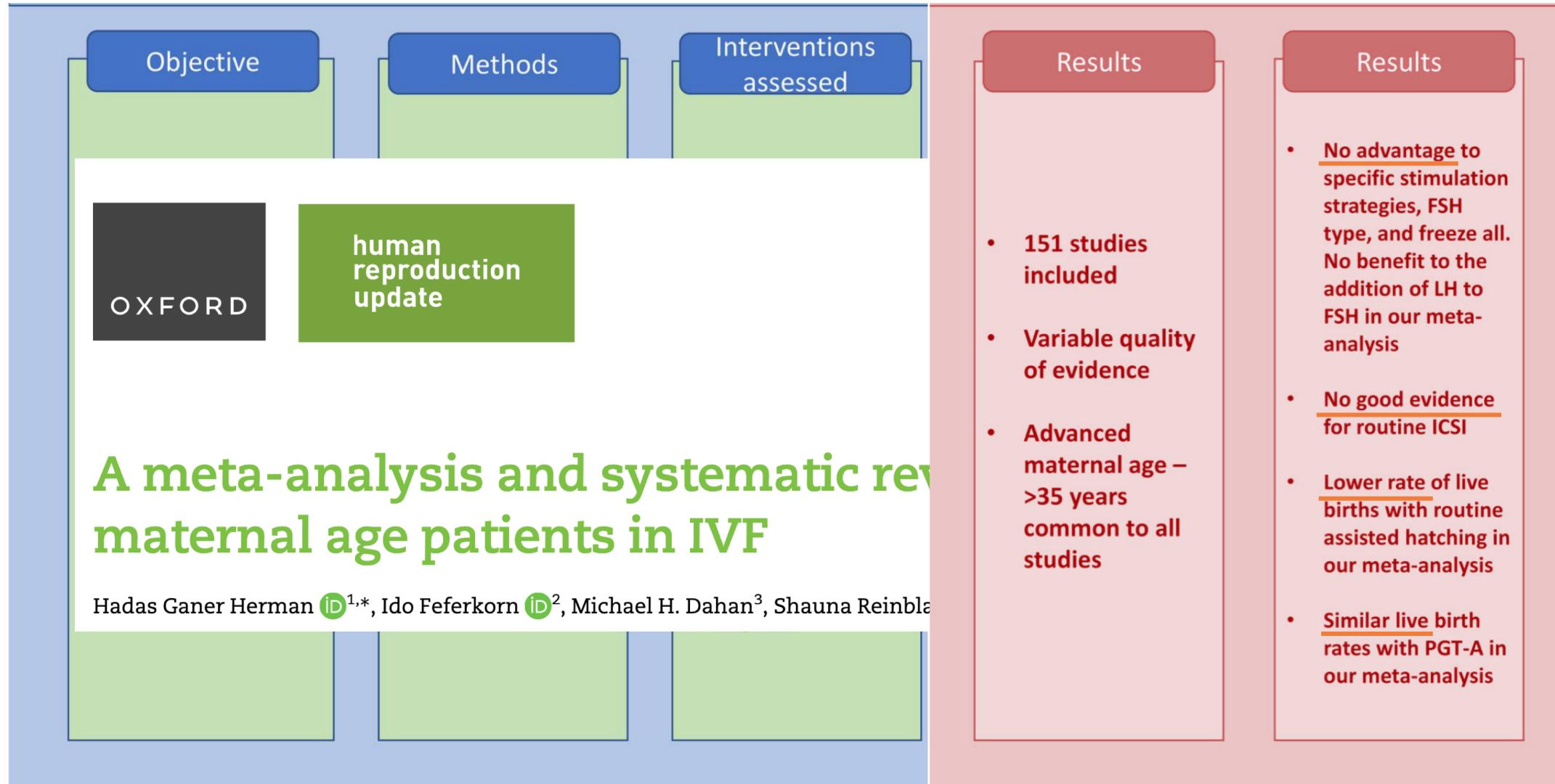
- Machtinger R, Tuval A, Hammerman A, Maman E, Nahum R, Orvieto R, Noah Hirsh M, Aizer A, Ziv Baran T. Age-Based Oocyte Yield in Elective Oocyte Cryopreservation: A Retrospective Cohort Study. *Diagnostics (Basel)*. 2025





- Wide et al. J Clin Endocrinol Metab. 2007;92:4410-4417
- Vihko et al. Eur J Endocrinol. 1996;134(3):357-61
- Zumoff et al. J Clin Endocrinol Metab. 1995;80:1429-30
- Bosch et al. Fertil Steril. 2011 Mar 1;95(3):1031-6

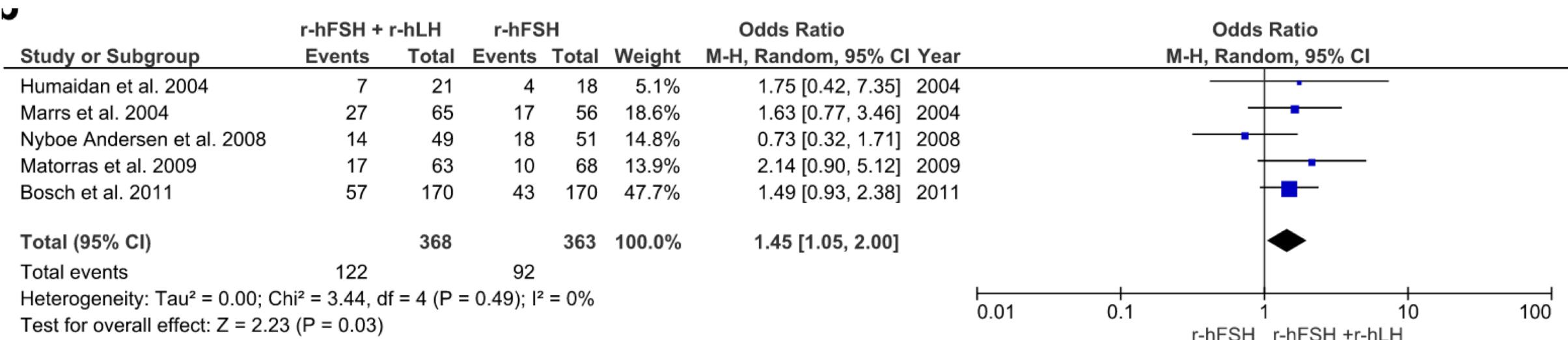
- Humaidan et al. Reprod Biomed Online. 2004 Jun;8(6):635-43
- Marrs et al. Reprod Biomed Online. 2004 Feb;8(2):175-8
- Matorras et al. Reprod Biomed Online. 2011 Feb;22 Suppl 1:S43-51



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Forest plot showing the effect of r-hFSH + r-hLH versus r-hFSH monotherapy in ovarian stimulation on **clinical pregnancy rates** between 35 and 40 years old



- Conforti A, Esteves SC, Humaidan P, Longobardi S, D'Hooghe T, Orvieto R, Vaiarelli A, Cimadomo D, Rienzi L, Ubaldi FM, Zullo F, Alviggi C. Recombinant human luteinizing hormone co-treatment in ovarian stimulation for assisted reproductive technology in women of advanced reproductive age: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Reprod Biol Endocrinol*. 2021 Jun 21;19(1):91. doi: 10.1186/s12958-021-00759-4



Analysis of CoQ10 on clinical pregnancy rate

Subgroup	No. of studies	No. of women	Effect estimate OR (95% CI)	I^2	P
Dose					
30 mg/d	3	363	2.76 (1.78, 4.28)	0%	<0.00001
600 mg/d	2	225	1.62 (0.86, 3.05)	0%	0.13
1200 mg/d	1	78	1.24 (0.34, 4.45)	—	0.75
Treatment duration					
2 mo before the COS	2	225	1.62 (0.86, 3.05)	0%	0.13
3 mo before the COS	4	441	2.54 (1.68, 3.84)	0%	<0.0001
Population					
>35 y old with diminished ovarian reserve	3	356	2.07 (1.17, 3.65)	0%	0.01
>35 y old with suboptimal ovarian response	1	39	1.38 (0.29, 6.58)	—	0.68
<35 y old with diminished ovarian reserve	2	371	2.38 (1.26, 4.50)	46%	0.007

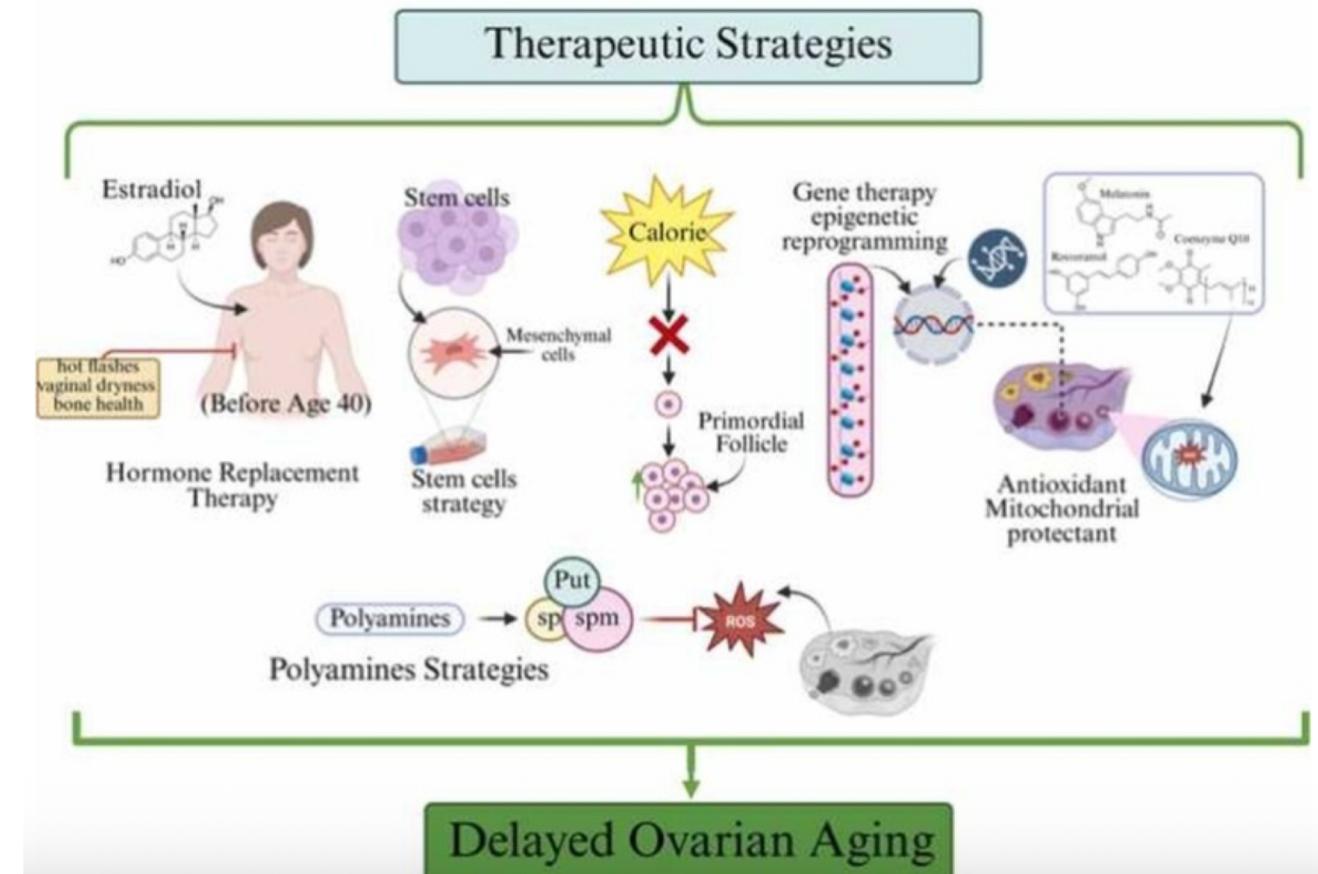
Low-dose CoQ10 (30 mg/day, 3 months) → possible ↑ clinical pregnancy
 Effect mainly in **younger women with DOR**, less in older patients
Evidence low, live birth benefit unclear, methodological bias

Emerging strategies to delay/reverse ovarian aging:

- Stem cell-based therapies
- Gene therapy
- Modulation of signaling pathways

Current status:

- Promising but experimental
- Require rigorous trials for efficacy, safety, and long-term impact



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Ovarian aging is multifactorial: genetic predisposition, epigenetic drift, mitochondrial dysfunction, and environmental stressors

Decline in oocyte quantity and quality accelerates after 35 years → reduced fertility and increased aneuploidy

Endocrine changes

- FSH ↑ with age, but glycosylation reduces receptor affinity → lower biological activity
- LH isoforms become less bioactive → impaired steroidogenesis and androgen production

Clinical impact

- Lower ovarian reserve (AMH, AFC) and diminished response to stimulation
- Higher IVF failure rates

Therapeutic strategies

- No effective therapeutic strategy
- Future directions: mitochondrial protection, stem cell-based therapies, oxidative stress reduction ?

Prevention: elective oocyte cryopreservation

Let's replace...

~~ADVANCED
MATERNAL
AGE~~

With gentler terms like...

Experienced Uterus

Extraordinary Ovary Owner

Skilled Maternal Broad

Veteran Vagina