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Pregnancy Spacing: What Is Best?

Wonder about the ideal spacing between children? A Mayo Clinic specialist chats about pregnancy spacing.

When I was a child playing house with my friends, I knew exactly what I wanted my grown-up life to be like. I'd be married to a tall, handsome pop singer (not telling which one — it would date me too much). We'd have four children, two boys and two girls with two years between each child. Out of that lovely fantasy, one thing came true. I got married.

I'm not sure why two years between children seemed like the perfect pregnancy spacing in my 9-year-old imagination. As an adult who started having children a little later in life, two years seemed too long between babies - yet my second and third children are two and a half years apart.

In the end, pregnancy spacing is often based on a combination of personal preference and luck. You might want to space your babies close together so you get the diapers and child care done earlier. You might want to space them further apart so you can enjoy the specific stages of growth and development with each child before you introduce another child. Sometimes you get pregnant sooner than you thought you would or long after you hoped you would.

When you're planning your next pregnancy, you have many things to consider:

Your health. Has your body completely recovered from pregnancy and birth? It can take a year or even longer to develop stores of essential nutrients that may have been depleted during pregnancy and breast-feeding. Your children. How will another baby affect your older child or children? Some people space children close together, hoping that the kids will feel like best friends. Others space them further apart to make sure that each child gets individual attention or is more independent when the next one comes along. Your finances.

What's the state of your budget? Having babies close together might get the drain of child care off the budget sooner, and it might be easier to focus on your career if the kids are all in school at the same time. On the other hand, spacing children further apart can give you more time to recover from the financial and emotional impact of pregnancy and early child care. Finally, remember that things don't always go according to plan — so be flexible. In the end, the ideal spacing between children is what works for you and your family.

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