MEN who think the biological clock ticks only for women should think again.

A father’s age is critical when it comes to the likelihood of his wife miscarrying, according to a new local study.

The study of 139 expectant mothers facing a threatened miscarriage found that a father-to-be aged over 40 is eight times more likely to see his wife miscarry than a younger man.

Dr Tan Thiam Chye, a consultant at the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at the KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital (KKH), who conducted the study from November last year to March, said the reasons as yet are far from clear.

Men have a biological clock too

“This is an indication that the biological clock ticks for the father as well. A lot more research is needed to understand the extent and reasons behind this risk.”

The study, done by KKH and the Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, is the first of its kind to be conducted among pregnant women here. It sought to understand the demographic and socio-economic factors that lift the risk of miscarriage in early pregnancy.

It found that a mother over 34 is twice as likely to miscarry as younger women. While past research has established that women over 34 face a higher risk of miscarriage due to the increased risk of genetic or chromosomal disorders of the foetus, this study has broken new ground in highlighting how critical the father’s age is too.

It also found that women who had miscarried before and those with low blood progesterone levels during their pregnancy were at a higher risk of miscarriage.

While many pregnant women complain about nausea, this is actually not a bad thing, the study found.

Nausea indicates that the risk of miscarriage is reduced by 70 per cent as it is caused by elevated levels of human chorionic gonadotropin, a hormone that has a protective effect on the pregnancy.

The study also looked at other factors such as stress levels, caffeine intake, mobile phone and computer usage – speculated to increase the risk of a miscarriage. It found that none of these was a risk factor.

Dr Tan said his team decided to study threatened miscarriage, where there is vaginal bleeding in the early stages of pregnancy, as it is a “significant problem affecting many pregnant women”.

KKH doctors see more than 1,000 such cases a month. Up to a quarter of these women end up miscarrying.

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