

Charlotte's story

My fertility journey started when I was 20. I was rushed to hospital with severe pain to my left side and vomiting. I had taken myself to the hospital twice the previous month with the same symptoms only to be told it was irritable bowel syndrome. This wasn't the case. I actually had an 11cm cyst on my left ovary which had twisted, cutting the circulation off and killing off my ovary. I also had an 8cm cyst on my right ovary which hadn't twisted yet, and severe endometriosis. All of this had been missed by my local hospital on my previous two visits as they failed to scan me.

I was operated on and lost my left ovary, but the doctors managed to save my right ovary. On returning to the hospital after six weeks I was told there was a 50% chance the cysts could reoccur on my right ovary and I could lose the ability to have children altogether. I was only 20, I had no partner or husband and no current plans to have children. I was devastated.

I was referred back to my local GP for three monthly check-ups/scans for a year which then turned into six monthly check ups/scans after the first year. I was not given any fertility advice or timescale to work towards by the NHS. I was told I would receive no help with fertility as the NHS in my county did not offer this and it was a postcode lottery. If I lived in the next town I would have been eligible. I was just told they would keep an eye on everything.

I was always conscious in the back of my mind that it would occur again. I joined the gym and tried to take care of myself as best I could. I researched private medical care only to be told they couldn't look after me as my case was being dealt with by the NHS. I looked into paying for egg harvesting myself to at least give myself the best odds later in life when I was ready to have children. I was emotionally a nervous wreck, crying every time someone brought up the subject of children and overall I just felt that I was never going to have them. Then five years later another cyst returned. I immediately knew there was a problem as I was having pain on my right side and recognised the pain from first time around. I rushed myself to the doctors who referred me to the hospital for an immediate scan. I had a 2.5cm cyst on my right ovary and the endometriosis had returned. I was operated on nine days before Christmas. The doctors were amazing and my ovary remains in great condition. The endometriosis was burnt away and I was referred to the fertility clinic.

The fertility clinic advised me that as everything was in normal working order that I am to try naturally for a year when I am ready (any time before I am 30 to give myself the best chance). If this does not happen then the NHS will fund my fertility treatment.

While this is more stress than many other 27-year-olds have to deal with, and issues which never should arise for someone so young, I am becoming increasingly more aware of this sort of medical issue becoming a problem with girls my age. The NHS are not the most helpful for people suffering with fertility issues and for people so young like myself with no prospect of having children in the near future; it is completely overwhelming and frightening. It seems to be only in severe cases that they are willing to spend the money to help people have a family. I just hope by the time it comes around that I may need help to conceive that the NHS system hasn't changed again.