

Daisy and Damian's story

Damian and I have always wanted children and so when we married in June 2014 we had already started trying for a family. We were both 34 and as each month passed we became experts on the different ways of monitoring ovulation, timing sex and tried just about every complementary therapy and alternative health product that made even a passing claim to boosting fertility. The morning beep of the thermometer served as a daily reminder that we weren't getting anywhere and after six months we went to a private clinic for a fertility MOT. A scan had showed a polyp in my womb that I would need surgery to remove, but all the other results were optimistic. The plan was to have the surgery and then have six more months of trying naturally.

The months passed without even a whiff of a line on a pregnancy test and soon we were back at the clinic to start fertility treatment. The initial phase of IVF seemed bonkers. I couldn't get my head around the fact that they sent you all these injections and drugs to your home and then that they let you loose with needles to administer them yourself. Being an absolute wimp when it comes to needles, Damian became my fertility meds administrator and every morning he would jab me with all the different drugs I needed to stimulate the egg growth.

We were back and forth to the hospital as they monitored my progress and then finally we were ready for egg collection. As I was wheeled off to the theatre to have the eggs removed, Damian was taken off to perform elsewhere, thankfully boarding school had prepared him well for this moment! We were told that they had removed 30 healthy eggs and that because there were so many they were going to have to freeze all the eggs and then transfer them in a couple of months once my body had recovered. I was heartbroken. We had built up to and prepared for this moment and now everything was on hold.

We returned home and when the painkillers wore off I started to feel awful. I was in so much pain that I could barely walk. I needed help even to get out of bed and was at times screaming in agony. Having not had IVF before I just assumed that this was part of it and so didn't want to make a fuss, but when we returned for our follow up a few days later the doctor told me that I was seriously ill with ovarian hyper stimulation syndrome (OHSS) which required urgent treatment. For the next few days I was in and out of hospital as they monitored me carefully. While all this was going on I became more maths obsessed than Carol Vorderman. Constantly doing 'fertility calculations' in your head while waiting for the clinic to update us on how many eggs had fertilised and how many were good enough to be frozen. In our case, out of 30 eggs, 20 had fertilised and we were left with eight embryos which were frozen.

My body recovered well and just before Christmas 2015 we had our little frostie (frozen embryo) transferred. Seeing as it is the most momentous part of the process, the transfer itself for us was a bit of an anti-climax - quick, easy and painless and within half an hour you are back in the car on the way home. Then the dreaded two-week wait. Finally the day of the blood test came and eventually the hospital phoned to tell us this attempt had been unsuccessful. We were heartbroken. It seemed so unfair after all we had been through. IVF had always been a last resort for us and now even that had failed.

Life moved on and eight weeks later we were back again this time to have two embryos transferred. Everything about this attempt felt different. I had given up my job to try to reduce stress and started swimming and doing yoga. We had also turned to our friends for help. Up until this point we had only told a few select people what we had been going through, but we

decided to start a Facebook group of some amazing friends who we knew we could share our feelings with. We had our own cheer team!

There were also no unknowns this time round in terms of the procedure and so I was much more relaxed. During the two-week-wait my in-laws came to stay and kept me sane while Damian was at work. Finally the day of the blood test came and once back from the hospital we did a pregnancy test. The result initially was negative and I was heartbroken but after a few minutes there was an unmistakable beautiful second pink line. We were overjoyed. We had ten blissfully happy days before we had an inkling that something was wrong. Blood tests showed that my human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG) level wasn't rising properly. A six-week scan showed that we had been expecting twins but that one hadn't developed and the other was very small. Three weeks of hellish worry followed punctuated by one amazing moment at our eight-week scan when we saw our baby's heart beat for the first time. Sadly at our nine-week scan that heart beat was gone.

I don't think anything can prepare you for it and there aren't really words to describe that moment. I don't really know how I coped with the actual miscarriage and the weeks that followed but I had a very fierce feeling that I had been someone's mummy. Not a mummy that will ever get to hold her baby and only a mummy for nine weeks but it still counts. I felt unbelievably sad but strangely strong. I was utterly determined to find a reason why we had lost the babies. For two years we had had 'unexplained infertility' and I felt very strongly that there had to be a reason why two people with healthy sperm, eggs, bodies and embryos were not getting pregnant. We decided to look into reproductive immunology and had some initial blood tests to try and identify if there was anything in my immune system that could be affecting my fertility.

The results showed that I have a condition called thrombophilia which means my blood clots too quickly making it difficult to sustain a pregnancy. They also found that my immune system is programmed to attack an embryo. Finally, after two years, a breakthrough! We knew why we hadn't been able to have a baby and also had a solution as to how we were going to fix it. I am currently undergoing a series of intravenous intralipid treatments to help suppress my immune system and make my body more baby-friendly, ahead of another transfer in a few months. It is a controversial and expensive treatment but it makes sense to me and I trust the team at the clinic.

Our fertility journey, like so many other people's journeys, has taken us through some unbelievable highs and extreme lows. It is still hard to accept that this has happened to us and barely a week goes by without one of our friends announcing a new baby is on the way. We are happy for them, but are so sad that it is not happening for us. We feel like we have failed at something that should be so easy.

There are days when the journey seems too hard when you feel financially, physically, mentally and emotionally broken. We also feel exasperated that sometimes we have to explain to people close to us why this matters so much and why our house feels quiet and empty. I no longer have the energy for these people. You either get it or you don't. But those people who do get it have the most special place in our hearts. In our darkest times we have friends who have given us hope for the future and the courage to continue. We will also be forever indebted to those clever people who experimented, developed and pioneered so that we, and thousands like us, can have a shot at becoming parents.

We have no doubt that we will someday become parents, whether that be via IVF or adoption, but I know that it is going to take everything we have to get there.