

## Naomi's story

I'm Naomi and I'm a mum to four- year-old Toby and our angel babies Rory and Henry.

We started trying for a baby in July 2006 when I was in my mid-20s, and in September 2008 we started IVF. Midway through treatment a scan showed that my ovaries had overreacted to the hormone injections and there was a high risk of ovarian hyper stimulation syndrome (OHSS) if we carried on so the treatment was abandoned.

In January 2009 we started our second attempt at treatment; my drugs had been adjusted because of how my ovaries had reacted last time. We managed to get some eggs, slightly less than we'd had hoped, but some was better than none. The next day we had a phone call to say that not many eggs had fertilised and they would call the next day with an update. The phone call came and I was told to come to the clinic as soon as possible for embryo transfer as only one had survived so the best course of action was to put it back where it belonged. This was the closest we'd ever been to being pregnant but it wasn't to be.

Our third attempt was in the summer of 2009, everything went according to plan with a good number of follicles showing at each scan, and about 30 eggs collected. Before going home after the egg collection we were advised that our embryos would have to be frozen as I was again at risk of developing OHSS. We went back at the end of October 2009 and had our embryos defrosted. A few didn't make it through the first day but there were two looking good for a day three transfer. About an hour before the embryo transfer appointment I had a phone call to say that the embryos had failed to develop overnight, they had defrosted two more but they weren't looking good either. We were in the same position as last time and we had two embryos put back. This treatment was unsuccessful and we were really sad as everyone around us seemed to be having babies.

Emotionally drained after three and a half years of trying for a baby, I convinced my husband to have a break from treatment. We went to lots of concerts and shows, had a holiday and generally tried to pretend all was well even though there was this huge hole in our lives. All the while friend after friend had happily announced their pregnancies and we were running out of excuses for not going to see the babies; it was all just too painful.

At the end of summer 2010 I was ready to try in vitro maturation (IVM) at a different clinic and we hoped for a better outcome. The egg collection day arrived and they collected a fair number of eggs, hubby did his bit and we were sent home. The clinic had a policy of only doing transfers on day five: this allowed the best embryos to be chosen.

We had daily phone updates and things were looking okay for a couple of days until I had a call to say that all our embryos had stopped developing: there was nothing to put back. The doctor said I had poor quality eggs and embryos, and confirmed my suspicion that donor eggs may be the answer.

At the time there was a wait of up to two years for donor eggs as the number of UK donors was low. The use of a clinic abroad was mentioned as it would shorten the wait considerably. We did some research into this and found that waiting times for treatment abroad were practically non-existent and the screening/treatment process was of a similar standard to here in the UK. We went away from our original clinic with some information about a clinic in Spain that had an arrangement with them where they handle the initial appointments before couples travel out to have treatment. We were reassured that the

Spanish have a culture of giving and many donors have had families already or just want to help others. Under Spanish law there is a limit on the number of children a donor can 'produce' and donors remain completely anonymous.

The clinic had an excellent reputation, good results (60% success rate), and their international department meant that we would deal with English-speaking staff during our treatment. From my own family experiences, I have always believed that 'family' is who you live/grow up with, not who shares your genes so the choice for me to use donated eggs was easy.

We were assigned a nurse at the UK clinic and a member of the international team at the clinic in Spain, and between the three of us we corresponded and arranged blood tests, scans, and medication. We had to supply photographs of ourselves and do a questionnaire to tell the clinic what we looked like (height, weight, hair/eye colour, etc.) so they could match us with a suitable donor. We were given a window of possible travel dates and these were only confirmed the day before we had to fly out: the donor had to be checked and if they were ready for egg collection then we were ready to travel. We decided to treat ourselves to the posh five star hotel - we thought that we may as well have a nice holiday too!

On our second day we went to the clinic. I was scanned and checked all was well for the embryo transfer later in the week, and hubby did his bit. The clinic was stunning, and the staff were brilliant, very caring and welcoming. We had regular updates about the number of eggs collected, number of embryos and likely day for transfer. In amongst all this we managed to have a nice holiday and chilled out in the sun - much needed!

The embryo transfer day arrived, we were nervous and excited. The doctor came and advised us that we had two embryos left, not ideal as there were none to freeze for future treatment, but we had a B and a C grade - more than enough to make a baby. On the morning of 27 May 2011 I went for a blood test and had to wait until the afternoon for the results and it was positive! We had a further blood test to confirm everything and a scan was booked for two weeks later to see how many babies were in there.

The day of the scan came and we had one perfect heartbeat - amazing! My pregnancy was very uneventful, my labour was a short and simple one and our perfect little boy was born 13 days early in January 2012. I am happy to say that Toby feels completely mine, because he is. We've had lots of people say that he looks like me which is reassuring but I still find it a bit weird! He is very much like me in personality too.

While we were so grateful to have Toby our family didn't feel complete. In July 2014 we contacted the clinic about further treatment and the rollercoaster began again. In October 2014 we travelled out to Spain as a three; logistics were more complicated now we had Toby. Transfer day came and we had one embryo put back and the other frozen. On 30 October a blood test confirmed that I was pregnant, I was shocked and happy that we would be a family of four. I felt incredibly lucky and a little bit of a cheat as everything felt all too easy.

Pregnancy second time around was hard: I felt dreadful and had bouts of spotting at seven to ten weeks which was very stressful as we'd had plain sailing with Toby. I felt horrid until around 16/17 weeks. At our 20-week scan all was normal and the reality of having another little boy in the family excited us! At around 22 weeks I had a puffy ankle, I put it down to too much rushing about but mentioned it to a colleague at work the next day who panicked a bit and told me to call the midwife as it could be pre-eclampsia. I laughed at her and said not to be so worried but promised I would call someone. The next day I was puffier so I got checked out, my blood pressure was slightly high so I was told to come back if I felt worse.

The next day my headache had returned and I felt worse throughout the day. After calling 111 we ended up at the pregnancy assessment unit. They were surprised that my blood pressure was sky high and I had plus four of protein in my urine. I was immediately put on blood pressure medication and admitted to labour ward for the weekend. On the Monday I had some scans and later that day we were given the devastating news that our baby had stopped developing and my pre-eclampsia was severe and if things didn't improve we'd have to terminate the pregnancy. We were in shock and couldn't comprehend that our baby could die. They had managed to control my blood pressure and I was sent up to the ward. The next day I was told that my condition had progressed to HELLP syndrome - essentially my liver was failing and my platelet count was falling.

Over the next couple of days my condition deteriorated and by the Thursday evening I had finally realised that I was actually quite poorly, this was backed up by my blood results showing that I was nearing a critical point. We were devastated to make the decision and that evening I was given medication to stop the pregnancy hormones and the journey to labour began. I was hooked up to various drips and monitoring devices and labour pains followed shortly. Rory was born at 1.12pm. He was alive but too small to survive so the decision was made to hand him over for some last cuddles before he slipped away. He died at around 2pm. We will always cherish the time we had with him. Rory was a replica of Toby, just much tinier. The shock and anger at going from happy healthy pregnancy to a dead baby within three weeks is never going to leave us, but we are so grateful to have Toby.

We are now a year from Rory's death and life is getting back to normal. As I write this I am pregnant with our spare embryo, I am well but again my placenta is failing and the baby is small. We do not know what the next few weeks hold but we live in hope that our baby will be born alive and strong enough to save. We are grateful to be a family of three which a few years ago never even seemed possible.

Update: Henry was born still on 19 June - he hadn't grown at all between scans and died the day before I went in to be induced.