

## Gemma's story

Our struggle with infertility has been a long hard four years and it has been a bumpy road to say the least.

Almost a year into our relationship my husband and I knew that we wanted to start a family, I was in my late 20's and he was in his 30's so we decided for me to come off the pill and see what happened. A year went by and there was still no baby for us. Then two years went by and still no bundle of joy. It was around this time that I started to worry. I knew my periods could be slightly irregular at times but I never thought it was a major issue; I was never in pain and believed it was just part of being a woman.

After two years of not falling pregnant we decided to try ovulation kits and online cycle trackers and making sure that we had sex every other day to really try and maximise our chances. The ovulation sticks were a nightmare and I never saw that smiley face that shows that you are ovulating and this is when I decided to seek help. I went to my GP who performed all of the necessary blood tests and surprisingly everything came back clear and normal. However, although everything was normal the GP, thankfully, decided to refer me to a fertility specialist as he was concerned that I hadn't fallen pregnant in almost three years.

My first appointment with the fertility specialist wasn't exactly a pleasant experience. For a man who works with women going through fertility issues he didn't really have the best tact. However, he booked for me to have a hysterosalpingogram where a dye is injected through your cervix while you have an x-ray. The dye helps to check if there any blockages on your fallopian tubes and low and behold my tubes were perfectly clear! This may seem like good news, but for me it just meant that there were still no answers as to why I wasn't pregnant yet. So instead of feeling relieved I felt really frustrated. The consultant gave me two options after this. He said that because it had been almost three years with no pregnancy he would refer me straight for IVF or I could try the drug ovulation stimulation drug Clomid. He believed that because no issues had been found so far Clomid would do the trick. The local hospital provided treatments such as Clomid and intrauterine insemination (IUI) but not IVF; I would have to be referred to a neighbouring hospital for that. So I agreed to try Clomid.

I have to say I found this drug really harsh on my body, however, even though the drug made me feel awful I responded perfectly. After four months there was still no pregnancy and now I was really starting to struggle emotionally. In this time all of my good friends were starting to fall pregnant and this really affected me so I decided to ask the consultant if I could stop the Clomid and be referred for IVF. I really thought that this would be the beginning of the end of our struggles for a family. I genuinely thought that IVF was our answer.

Everything went so perfectly during the first cycle in terms of response to medications and our embryos. We had twelve eggs retrieved with ten fertilising and five making it to five day blastocysts. Our embryologist even told us she wished she could give all couples such good news! We had four frozen and one transferred. We were sure this was it. After an uneventful first week of the two-week wait, on day eight I starting bleeding heavily - my period had come right on schedule. To say we were heartbroken was an understatement. The nurses advise to carry on taking your meds as you never know, but we knew. I didn't need a blood test to tell me that.

After a short break we went ahead with our first frozen embryo transfer (FET). The protocol is a lot shorter and easier on the body so I thought that maybe this gave us a better chance. My body would be going through less trauma, as there was no egg retrieval. The day of the transfer went smoothly, we came home and rested for the remainder of the day. Around seven that evening I began to spot. I was assured that it may have been a nick from the catheter at transfer, however as the days progressed the bleeding got heavier. Another unsuccessful transfer.

We had a meeting with one of the consultants who assured us that he had seen no evidence of anything untoward in any scans to suggest there was a problem with my womb and that sometimes it just takes a little longer for humans to get pregnant. He informed us that if the next transfer were to fail I would then be given further blood tests and qualify for the endometrial scratch. The scratch is supposed to stimulate the lining of the womb to encourage implantation. So we went ahead with the second FET and like clockwork the second week my period came.

That is our journey so far with infertility. In terms of cycles we are still in early days. We qualify for three full cycles on the NHS and we are still in our first. We did plan on having a lengthy break but after all of the further blood tests came back normal again we have decided to press ahead with the scratch and the next FET in the summer. I only hope and pray that is the answer. I would say the most frustrating part of this last couple of years during treatment is that we have no answers, no real reason why I won't fall pregnant even with fantastic embryos. Unexplained infertility really is a kick in the teeth; however we will keep pressing forward until hopefully it all works out.