

## Helen's story

When our son Zac was born on Christmas Eve 2007, not only was he the perfect Christmas present, he was also the answer to all my prayers. After three years trying to conceive, six months of Metformin and four months of Clomid; we were blessed with our precious baby.

That was until he was around two and the feelings of wanting to expand the family and give Zac a sibling started. Having previously being diagnosed with polycystic ovaries, just turned 36 and already trying naturally for six months, we revisited the fertility clinic which had helped us conceive Zac.

Clomid worked before, surely it would work again? After twelve months, still no joy. Living our lives fortnight by fortnight began to get wearing. Build up for ovulation, testing for a smiley face, the deed, day 21 blood tests, build up to my period and crying when it arrived. It was a cycle we repeated over and over and as time went on it got harder and harder. As the last of the course of Clomid drew closer I started to panic. IVF had always seemed like my 'great white knight', the final dice to throw when all else had failed and a dice that I was too fearful to through in case it didn't work. As long as it was in my locker I felt I had hope.

To then be told that IVF would be our best option was utterly terrifying. I panicked. I wasn't ready to play that card and the control freak in me hadn't researched enough. Thankfully, our professor gave us three more months of Clomid, which gave me time to calm down and read all about what the procedure entailed.

Three months came and went and still no positive.

I would watch Zac play on his own and wish he had a playmate. I'd cry after trying to explain why he didn't have a baby to play with like his friend did, and I'd die inside when he'd ask me if there was a baby in my tummy.

Collecting the first bag of drugs was both terrifying but exciting. We were asked to perform the first injection before we left the clinic. I was so desperate to start but it took more than 20 minutes to actually get that needle into my tummy! I'm terrified of needles but it was more the alien feeling of apparently self-harming that prevented me from pushing it in. Hundreds of needles later I found it was a piece of cake.

We were on the road to another baby and I was so excited. I told everyone we were doing the treatment because, to me, it felt like we were within touching distance of our much longed for second child. Half-way through, however, I was rocked to the core as I suffered terribly with ovarian hyper stimulation syndrome (OHSS) and was really poorly to the extent where the cycle was nearly cancelled. Fortunately, 'coasting' for a few days helped and we could proceed with the harvest and transfer, but the reality that it wasn't plain sailing was worrying.

We had a bumper crop of eggs and healthy embryos that made it to day five blastocyst. We were excited and waited patiently during the dreaded two-week wait. And then I bled. One week in, at work, before a client meeting. I rang the clinic and they said it might be implantation and to still take the test one week later. The bleeding slowed and I could hardly concentrate on anything.

When the test showed positive I couldn't believe my eyes. We were pregnant. My family was coming to stay that weekend and together we hugged, celebrated and I called close friends.

Two days later though, after intense stomach ache, I suffered a considerable loss and we had to face that we'd lost the pregnancy. We were utterly devastated.

Two further failed cycles certainly took it out of us. As soon as the test proved positive or I bled, I broke down, but through tears I arranged to go again. I was desperate for my baby and needed to keep going. After three rounds in nine months I was exhausted in every measure possible. We were spending our savings but that didn't matter.

Every day there was a milestone with Zac as he changed from a baby to a toddler and now to a little boy. He had outgrown his nursery and moved into a big boy bedroom, he had now started school and with the passing of each achievement I felt my baby slipping from me and the void in my heart growing bigger. The pain was immense and irrepressible. Every day, everywhere, it was right before my eyes. Friends fell pregnant, there were bumps wherever I turned and constant reminders that every other woman on the planet seemed to be able to make a baby except me. My tears were continual and my heart simply ached.

Worse still, I had few people to turn to. 'Well you have Zac!' they'd say and the guilt of knowing I had what many women still wished for, yet I wanted more, weighed so heavy. I felt huge guilt. There was literally no support. People just didn't understand.

We decided we could manage one more go. I was already rock bottom so another failure couldn't knock me down further. This time the drugs were tweaked slightly and though I still exercised and ate well I dropped the acupuncture and reflexology and embarked with not a shred of optimism. For the first time we also had two embryos transferred as we believed this would be our fourth and final attempt.

This time I didn't pray for a baby, I prayed to take the yearning away. I was literally spent up. The last thing I expected was a positive result, a twin pregnancy and just six months later, two beautiful 2lb, but now healthy, happy babies. Secondary infertility is still infertility and the pain is immense. One in 18 couples suffer and need our support.