

Sally's story

I found out I was pregnant in April 2011. My husband and I were so happy. I was beyond excited and walked around with a secret smile on my face. We told our parents and I told my very close friends. My husband was going to be away for a lot of the pregnancy but we were glad he would be back for the birth.

In July at 13 weeks pregnant I went for my first scan; as my husband was away I had gone with my parents. It didn't take long for the sonographer to tell me that there was no heartbeat. I was suffering a miscarriage. It was absolutely devastating and especially difficult as my husband was 8,000 miles away. I saw a nurse and was reassured that this was common and my chances of conceiving again would be good. I had an evacuation of retained products of conception (ERPC) one week later. It is the best decision I made, rather than let nature take its course. Physically I felt an emotional wreck and believed this helped.

Although I felt I had gone through one of the most tragic times of my life I decided after two weeks to go back to work. As the next few months carried on I was convinced things weren't right. I still hadn't had a period and began to have hot flushes, night sweats and a racing heart. I found them horrendous. I googled my symptoms and the only thing that came up was the menopause. I didn't understand, I had just been pregnant. I was very scared and I was only 33.

I eventually went to the doctor after several months. He did some blood tests. When they came back my follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and LH luteinizing hormone (LH) levels were sky high. The doctor explained that the early menopause looked likely. This was now a whole new situation to deal with. I just could not understand what was going on. I endlessly looked things up on the internet. I went to an appointment with my husband to see an endocrinologist who bluntly told me with no compassion that I was going through the menopause. I was told I would not be able to have my own children due to my poor egg quality. I felt speechless and as we left the room. I was so upset a nurse had to take me to a room to calm down. I immediately felt my femininity stripped from me. To have my fertility put in jeopardy was not something I had ever thought of when I got married. I had always wanted a family.

I saw another doctor at the hospital and was told I could still carry a child using an egg from a donor and undergo IVF. This would be at my cost of around £6,000 and I was told I would be better going to Spain for treatment. We were also told to consider adoption. It was unlikely I would ever have gone full term on a pregnancy as I was born with low egg reserve. I guess years of taking the contraceptive pill and having the implant had masked any problems with my periods. By December I was prescribed the contraception pill to help with the menopause symptoms.

Although we really wanted a family we both finally agreed that neither option was for us. We wanted our own children. It was as simple as that for both of us. My husband was amazing beyond belief. He knew what to say from the beginning. He said: 'I married you for you.' To him children were a bonus. He said it was okay. He stood by me and I knew this would not destroy us. He immediately pulled me up from the dark hole I could see looming. He made me realise we still had a life ahead of us.

Life continued and we began to get over what had happened. Matt and I began to enjoy our life again. We would talk about all the things we could do because we didn't have children. We shaped our lives around this. We are both determined individuals and I am naturally a happy person and this positivity always encouraged us.

Our decision in no way means we are not affected by being childless. I am reminded of it all the time. Society is so based on 'family' that I often feel I don't play a part in this. Some things make me upset still and I find certain situations difficult. Anything from someone telling me they are pregnant, a children's birthday party or something on TV. However, I adore being with my nieces and nephews and friends' children are incredibly important to me. This has made me embrace this instead of avoiding it. I talk when I need to. I have learnt to choose the people I talk to carefully and I surround myself by people that make me feel better.

The hardest thing for me is I feel I have denied Matt the opportunity to be a Dad because he would have been fantastic. However, we have worked together as a couple and some cognitive behavioural therapy has helped me. I absolutely stand by our decision. Being childless does not mean life can't be fulfilled. I am very grateful for my husband, family, nieces and nephews, friends, job, home, health and holidays.

I am now 39. I have tried hormone replacement therapy for the last 3 years but at the moment it is not working for me so I have stopped it. I now feel more comfortable as a woman than ever. People often remark how strong and happy I am.

I still feel there is not enough help for those that have suffered miscarriages, early menopause or other infertility problems. All need a huge amount of empathy. I used to feel embarrassed telling people I have gone through the early menopause to the point I rarely talked about it. Now I can.

I hope sharing my story can help.