

Laura's fertility journey

My lengthy fertility journey started in 2012 after my husband and I had been married for 2 years. We wanted to start a family, and so I stopped taking the pill and assumed it would be easy. My periods returned with a vengeance and I just thought it was a side effect from stopping the pill.

I started to get ill every month with severe period pain and a menstrual migraine. This actually went on for 2 years before I convinced my GP to refer me to see a specialist gynaecologist! After a trans-vaginal ultrasound scan he suggested I might have fibroids and potentially endometriosis. Both would affect my fertility. I had my first laparoscopy confirming that I had both conditions. At the same time, one of my friends had started trying to conceive, and was successful in getting pregnant straight away. I was really happy for her, but started to feel a bit sorry for myself and my husband because it was getting harder and harder to keep trying to conceive.

After my first laparoscopy, my consultant tried me on a drug called Clomid (Clomifene). This is a tablet that basically helps you to ovulate. It didn't work for me, instead I had severe migraines and again my period became horrendous and unmanageable.

By 2018, I'd had 4 laparoscopies and 1 myomectomy to remove endometriosis, adhesions (scar tissue) and polyps. I was stuck in a cycle of having surgery to correct issues, only for it to make things worse through the formation of scar tissue.

We had our first round of IVF (ICSI) in 2018. We had everything crossed that it would work, each scan seemed to be favourable. 10 eggs were collected, 7 fertilised and 2 were transferred to my uterus. The remaining 5 embryos didn't develop. Unfortunately, it hadn't worked and we were heartbroken. I went back to work and tried to pretend I was ok. I had no idea how to react when a friend told me that she had just had a second successful round of IVF through going private. She also mentioned that another friend was also pregnant with her 3rd baby naturally (they didn't think they'd be able to conceive a 3rd so decided to start trying and were successful straight away).

For the second round of IVF, we went to a different clinic. I'd taken time off work to focus on the IVF cycle this time. I'd also had acupuncture and was on a new/stronger fertility supplement. This time, 5 eggs were collected and 4 fertilised (good news). Again, 2 were transferred to my uterus as the remainder didn't develop. I had a horrible feeling that this cycle had also failed when I started to get my usual menstrual migraine during the two week wait. Yep, my period started and the pregnancy test was negative.

In 2020, after more surgeries we did a third round of IVF using an egg donor. This time, 4 eggs were collected and 2 were fertilised. This round was also unsuccessful.

By 2021, it was our fourth round of IVF (again using an egg donor). This time 9 eggs were collected! We were both cautiously optimistic as surely we would have a greater chance? However, only 7 made it to insemination and then 4 ended up fertilised. We had 1 blastocyst transferred to my uterus and pinned all our hopes on it. This was the first time we'd actually had a blastocyst transferred. It didn't work. The pregnancy test was negative. Our consultant said she could not do anything else to help us. We were heartbroken again but I'm glad she was honest with us.

We are now with a 3rd fertility clinic. At the time of writing this, we are currently waiting to start our 5th and final round via an egg donor. I'm also waiting to have my 11th surgery to remove my remaining fallopian tube (this needs to be done before we do the IVF round). This fallopian tube is leaking fluid into my uterus (hydrosalpinx), and this can be toxic to an embryo. After several scans, I also was told that my uterine lining may be too thin to even sustain a pregnancy. Unsurprisingly, this is due to all the surgeries and scar tissue. At this point, it had been a while since my husband had his semen tested and so he queried this with our clinic. They carried out a test and it (predictably) revealed a higher DNA fragmentation than last time. It's another blow but our consultant suggested continuing with fertility supplements, adding in Vitamin E, and the possibility of us doing a round of PIMSI (a specialised method of sperm selection to identify the 'ideal' sperm for fertilising the egg) instead of ICSI.

The clinic did a mock cycle for us last year with the aim of trying to thicken my uterine lining. This involved A LOT of hormones (injections, patches, pessaries), so much so that I had severe nausea for several days. I felt stronger for getting through it though (as well as managing to inject myself on a moving train). The mock cycle was successful (the lining thickened substantially) and so my consultant will be prescribing the exact same doses for our 5th and final cycle.

I've been told that a lot of people have unlimited rounds of IVF and are successful on the 10th or 11th try. My husband and I can't continue as we just need to draw a line and make peace with it. We have been trying to conceive since 2012, and this whole journey has chipped away at my mental health. I'm already broken, and I'm not sure if I even have the fight in me to do another round.