

Michelle's story

It all starts on 10 May 2005 – the day we decided to start trying for a baby. Little did we know what lay ahead. After six months I started to think that this wasn't going to happen quite as easily as I thought and then when it reached a year later we started to get ourselves checked out and went along to the doctor who referred us to the Assisted Conception Unit at the nearest major hospital. We were now labelled as "infertile". I thought "Great – sounds all doom and gloom...."

Tests and initial treatment

Anyway, we had blood tests and a sperm test and everything came back as fine – no problems. So now we had "unexplained infertility". I wasn't sure whether this was better than actually finding something wrong. When there's something wrong, at least it can be worked at and maybe fixed but with us it was just going to be a long trial. Hospital appointments were awful at this time. We had to see a consultant and all he said was try this and come back in three months. Appointments just seemed a complete waste of time and we were going nowhere.

In November 2006 we asked about a 21-day blood test which we'd read about (a test for progesterone, which shows whether ovulation has occurred) and had not been done. Fortunately our appointment landed on day 21 of my cycle and so it was done, and the results were fine.

Then from November 2006 to April 2007 I took Clomid (a fertility drug that indirectly stimulates the ovaries into producing eggs) for 6 months (again we had to ask for it) but nothing happened. We had to wait for the next appointment two months later.

Private treatment

By now we'd been trying for 2 years and it felt like a long waiting game. You always seem to be waiting.... waiting for appointments...waiting for results....waiting to hear what you can do next.

As we had unexplained infertility we had to try things out first – start with AIH and then IVF as a last option. So we went onto the waiting list for funded treatment... waiting again. But we'd had enough of waiting! So we paid for a cycle of AIH. This cost about £600-£700.

Suddenly because we were paying for things, we seemed to move forward and it felt fantastic that we were actually doing something. It was a bit scary at first, not knowing what was to happen but really easy to follow. I had to do one injection every second day (about four or five in total) and there were several trips to the hospital for scans to check all was fine but I didn't mind as I felt we were being looked after and this was the first time something was being done about it.

Artificial insemination

The injections were really easy to get used to and with the auto injector it doesn't really look like you're injecting yourself. My husband David absolutely hates needles but he even admitted that it didn't look too scary. We live five minutes from the hospital so my partner could provide his sample at home on the day of the insemination. Off we went to the hospital to conceive our child – not quite how we'd imagined it but never mind. Then when it came to the pregnancy test it was a negative result. We were devastated!

“Chemical” pregnancy

But then my period didn't come and I was having stomach aches so a week later on a Sunday morning when my partner went to make a cup of tea in bed I did another sneaky pregnancy test and it was positive! Wow! I was pregnant. This was such a feeling. We were both completely over the moon and crying with happiness.

But it only lasted a week as I started to bleed and we had to go back to the hospital to be told it had been a “chemical” pregnancy. (We didn't understand at the time but it's where there is a problem after conception and the embryo starts to implant, giving a positive pregnancy (hCG) test but then stops developing before the first scan is due.) So we lost 'our baby' at 6 weeks. This was worse. One minute we'd been low, the next as high as a kite and then we hit rock bottom. We cuddled each other and had a good cry.

Further treatment

I then had to wait a month to get my cycle back on track and settle down a bit but by that time our funding was through for 3 cycles of AIH. We did 2 cycles one after the other. Both had a negative result.

Then it was Christmas so we took a break with the idea to do the last one in February 2008. I didn't like this though as I hated not doing anything. I get very frustrated when nothing is happening and I'm not taking any drugs or not trying to help things along. Then when I went for my scan in February I was told we couldn't do it as I had a cyst, so I had to wait another month. We did our last cycle of AIH in March and again the result was negative.

Changing tack

Now we'd had 3 years of trying and 1.5 years of treatments. We were getting weary and decided it wasn't going to happen with AIH. So we went onto the waiting list for one funded cycle of IVF. I phoned the hospital to ask them about how long the wait would be. Luckily I spoke to them just as they were sorting out budgets. We received a letter a few days later to say the funding had been granted and we could start straight away. So we moved onto our IVF journey.

Undergoing IVF

First we had to attend a group session which lasted 2 hrs and we were told everything about the IVF treatment. We came away with our heads spinning with information. It was scary but we just wanted to get going.

Then we had to wait for another appointment – our consent signing appointment where they discuss the number of embryos to be transferred and freezing them, etc. I also had to do another blood test for FSH levels (levels of Follicle Stimulating Hormone, which stimulates the ovary to ripen a follicle), so they know what level of drugs to put you on.

By the time this was all done I started my daily Buserelin injections (a synthetic hormone that causes the pituitary gland to be suppressed so that natural internal hormones don't interfere with the ones being given for ovarian stimulation) on day 21 of my cycle in mid June. A scan was done 2 weeks later and all was clear so I started my other injection, Menopur (tradename of a fertility drug, which is a mixture of follicle stimulating hormone and luteinising hormone). So now I was doing two injections every day.

I went back to the hospital 11 days later and the clinicians looked at the size and number of my follicles. I was told I had 5 follicles on the right over 10mm and the largest 18mm. I had several others just under 10mm on both sides, so it was decided to go ahead with egg collection. I took my final injection, Pregnyl (tradename of Human Chorionic Gonadotropin, which can be used to mimic luteinising hormone to trigger ovulation), on a Saturday evening and was all ready for egg collection on the Monday morning. The procedure was fine, very quick and easy. I felt slightly sore afterwards but not too bad and 10 eggs had been collected – a fantastic result! My partner had produced his sample too and all was looking good, so we came home to rest.

IVF results

On Tuesday morning I didn't want to do anything until I'd heard from the hospital with the results on how many had fertilised. Finally at near enough midday we had a call to say 9 of the 10 had fertilised. This was superb! We were so pleased. We then went back the next day for the transfer and we were told 2 embryos were ready to transfer – one was a grade 1 and one was a grade 2. But unfortunately the other 7 were no good and had to be discarded. This was really bad news and we had mixed emotions as we had the 2 embryos we wanted, but at the same time our plan B to freeze embryos for a back up was no longer an option.

We had to think positively, so we focused on what we had got, not what we hadn't got. Now we were on to the dreaded 2 week wait and this is the worst time. You are no longer doing any injections and you don't know if it's worked. You worry over the slightest twinge. I started to bleed the night before doing the test so we knew it hadn't worked and the test the next morning confirmed it was negative.

Next steps

In July 2008, not long after getting the negative result, we took a bit of time to think where to go next. There were lots of options but we didn't want to make any hasty decisions.

Dealing with the problems of infertility is extremely hard and we feel that it is important you talk to your partner and make sure you are in this together. It is important that you make decisions together and you are both happy to move onto each stage.

Our relationship is stronger as we've come through these difficult times and shared the emotional roller coaster ride. We have also had loving support from both sets of parents and close family. We wanted to tell our parents as our families are very close and it is good to talk.

Both of us have also had a good friend each who have gone through IVF and had failure and success so it really helped that we could have a good chat to someone else who knew exactly what we were going through.

A surprise

Then our story got even more confusing. The following month I fell pregnant – totally naturally. This was a complete shock but a great step forward as we had lost all faith in getting pregnant by ourselves. But right from when I did the test at 5 weeks I had spotting. I did 4 pregnancy tests as couldn't quite believe it. I felt very scared and every now and again would get excited, but I didn't want to get too carried away. I went to the doctor about the spotting as sometimes it was quite light bleeding but as I was under 6 weeks there wasn't much that could be done.

Another disappointment

Then our greatest fears were realised and just under 6 weeks I started to bleed heavily. So I went back to the doctor and was referred to the Early Pregnancy Unit at the hospital. (I couldn't go back to the Assisted Conception Unit as this had been a natural pregnancy.) They scanned me and confirmed that once again I was having a miscarriage.

Moving forward

So after 4 AIH treatments, 1 IVF cycle and 2 miscarriages we're now wondering where we go from here. It all seems incredibly unfair and life is very cruel.

We have decided to have a break for 6 months. We were going to go straight into paying for another go at IVF but we need a break from it all and there may be a chance that I can fall pregnant naturally again.