

Parenting

'IVF cost us £22k but our two sons are worth it'

WHEN Marie Crutchley started trying for a baby, she imagined it would be easy.

She says: "I met my husband, Mark, when I was 16, had a mortgage by 18 and got married at 20. I desperately wanted a family and felt it was the next logical step."

The couple, who live in Knutton, started trying in 2000 but in 2001 they received the devastating news that Mark had a low sperm count and they would be unable to conceive naturally.

Marie says: "We didn't have treatment straight away. I was a bit freaked out by it."

"I think I went into shock. I remember thinking this kind of thing doesn't happen to me – it happens to other people."

Then in 2003 Marie and Mark made the decision to start IVF.

As Marie was still only 21, she was optimistic the treatment would succeed. So when the first cycle failed, the disappointment was crushing.

Marie says: "IVF is probably the most stressful and heartbreaking thing I have been through in my life. For the first cycle I was really optimistic because I was so young and I built my hopes up."

To make matters worse Marie became very ill with ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) – where the ovaries become filled with fluid. OHSS is the most serious complication of IVF and in severe cases can even be fatal.

The 29-year-old childminder says: "I was very poorly as well as having a failed IVF. We were also spending a lot of money on the treatment so when a cycle failed, we were also upset that we had paid out so much money for nothing."

She eventually conceived her son Ethan, now aged four, after their third cycle of IVF in February 2006.

She carried out a pregnancy test at 4am

Primary Care Trusts across the country are considering stopping funding for fertility treatments in the wake of budget cuts. Catherine Ball spoke to one mum about how IVF fulfilled her dream of having her own family

because she couldn't wait any longer.

She added: "I ran upstairs screaming when I got a positive and Mark fell out of bed and injured his shoulder."

"I just couldn't believe we'd done it. I had told myself I was never going to have a baby and become a mum and then to find out I was pregnant it was amazing."

Ethan was born five weeks early in October 2006 and almost immediately Marie knew she wanted another child.

During her second cycle of IVF she had six embryos frozen. There is a lower chance of conceiving with a frozen embryo as some don't survive being thawed but Marie and Mark decided to use the embryos to try and have another child.

She says: "When I first had the embryos frozen I thought it wouldn't work so I decided to have a third go at IVF and had Ethan. Then when I found out I couldn't breastfeed Ethan and have IVF, I decided to have a go at frozen embryo transfer (FET)."

With FET the embryos are already three days old when they are frozen. They are then implanted three days

after ovulation. Marie says:

"I didn't want to stop breastfeeding because of the IVF. Infertility had already taken so much from me, I didn't want it to take anything away from Ethan."

In 2008 Marie had her first embryo transfer, which was unsuccessful. They then had another attempt.

Marie says: "When I lay there, I thought I have had enough of infertility – whatever happens this is it."

Fortunately the second attempt at FET worked and in July 2009 Marie gave birth to Sam, now aged 15 months.

She adds: "Sam was actually conceived a good year before Ethan so he should be five now."

As North Staffordshire PCT doesn't fund any cycles of IVF, Marie and Mark, a 49-year-old head chef, had to pay for all their treatments themselves. In total they spent £22,000 on having their two boys.

Marie says: "I think it's disgusting that in some areas you can get it on the NHS and we get nothing. I think there should be a blanket policy for everywhere."

"It isn't your fault you are infertile – it's a medical problem."

Both Marie's children were conceived after treatment at St Jude's Women's Hospital in

Wolverhampton, which now has a sister clinic at Sandy Lane in Newcastle.

She adds: "They are so wonderful at that clinic – to them you are a person and not a number. I owe them everything."

But Marie says she would not go through IVF again.

She added: "If I was to conceive naturally that would be wonderful but I could never go through it again. We have been so incredibly lucky, I don't think we should push it."

"I had so many years of wanting a family, I definitely don't take Ethan and Sam for granted. Every year at the Christmas lights I end up crying. I think I can't believe I am here with my children."

Marie and Mark Crutchley with their two boys, Ethan, left, and Sam.

IVF factfile

■ INFERTILITY is the most common reason for women aged 20 to 45 to see their GP, after pregnancy itself.

■ Infertility is estimated to affect around one in seven UK couples – approximately 3.5 million people – at some point.

■ During the IVF process, eggs are removed from the ovaries and fertilised with sperm in the laboratory. The fertilised egg (embryo) is later placed in the woman's womb.

■ In the UK 36,861 women had 46,829 cycles of IVF treatment in 2007.

■ About 1.5 per cent of all births in the UK are the result of IVF or Donor Insemination. In 2007 there were 11,091 successful births as a result of IVF, producing a total number of 13,672 babies as some were twins or triplets.

■ In the UK 75 per cent of IVF treatment is paid for privately while 25 per cent is funded by the NHS.

■ The average success rate for IVF treatment using fresh eggs is 32.3 per cent for women under 35. The treatment is less likely to work the older a woman becomes and women aged 40 to 42 have a success rate of just 11.1 per cent.

■ IVF is more likely than natural conception to result in multiple births. The latest figures show that 23 per cent of treatment cycles resulted in more than one baby.

■ The average cost of a cycle of IVF is £5,000.



Mum's the word

with Sentinel writer Zita Collinson

Zita Collinson is a 29-year-old Sentinel features writer, from Stoke, and mum to five-year-old Max. In her column, she takes a look at the weird, wonderful and sometimes weary world of parenting.

"THERE'S definitely something going round," seems to be a common refrain at this time of year.

It's the catch-all complaint which covers most illnesses from sickness to a runny nose.

Come winter, everyone you speak to is somehow qualified to sagely nod and agree that they too know of the flu/cold/virulent strain of malaria that's doing the rounds.

Well, whatever that "something" might be, I've got it.

After waking up with a ferocious sore throat and headache, I've been laid low for much of the past week.

And I'm feeling pretty sorry for myself. Admittedly more than is reasonable for a grown woman.

It's partly down to the fact that I'm an only child and I expect attention to be lavished on me.

Unfortunately, as a mum, I've very quickly realised that being poorly is an indulgence that I can't afford.

For a start, I can barely remember what I've taken and when.

OK, so I'm careful when I have to be. I'm cautious with Paracetamol. But I'm positively reckless when it comes to Strepsils, Locketts and Tunes.

That's because I now have someone other than myself to think about.

Whenever Max has to take medicine, I'm on the ball.

When it comes to looking after myself, though, I'm a very bad patient.

The worst time was when I kept distractedly popping a particularly numbing variety of cough sweet.

It pleasantly soothed away my pain but also had the unfortunate side-effect of dulling my senses until my jaw went slack and I could barely speak.

I felt like I'd had a nasty visit to the dentist. It wasn't a good look.

At least it made me seem far more ill than I really was.

Then there's the time factor. If I was a celeb with an army of nannies at my disposal, I'd probably think nothing of checking myself into hospital for some rest (although it's funny how "exhaustion" has become an accepted term for rehab).

Unfortunately, just like every other mum and dad I know, we have to soldier on. Because there's always so much stuff to do when you've got kids.

Shopping, washing, cleaning and going to work doesn't stop just because you're feeling slightly under the weather. Or even if you're feeling like death warmed up.

Max, I'm pleased to report, is always sympathetic.

Thanks to a teachers' training day, he had the day off school last Monday.

I'd booked some time off work so the plan was we'd go off somewhere to end the half-term holiday in style.

Sadly, I couldn't summon enough energy to lift myself up from the sofa.

Propped up by cushions, I heard the words guaranteed to pull at the heart strings of the most hard-hearted parent. "I'll look after you Mummy."

Forget super-strength tonics and potions.

You can even keep your face-anaesthetising lozenges.

Guilt really is the best medicine.

