

Infertility

The second time around

Although fairly common, secondary infertility is rarely spoken about. After one or more successful births, many families find themselves unable to conceive. Courageous Katy couples share their stories of overcoming the stigma associated with this perplexing diagnosis.

Written by Meagan Clanahan | Photography by Melissa Crowder

Defined as the inability to get pregnant or maintain a pregnancy following the unassisted conception of other biological children, secondary infertility presents families with intense emotional and physical challenges. While discussions of primary infertility have become more commonplace, couples going through secondary infertility may feel more hesitant to speak out for fear of judgment from outsiders. It is also typical for those afflicted to grapple with feelings of intense guilt, selfishness, or even inadequacy.

Yearning to Conceive

Katy wife and mother Amanda Woodard knows what it's like to yearn for another baby. She and her husband Richard have an 8-year-old daughter named Grace. Woodard would love nothing more than to make her a big sister, but infertility is blocking their dreams. After having no trouble conceiving Grace, and after not taking precautionary measures for the past four years, they have found themselves unable to get pregnant. "I'm blessed to have one child," says

Woodard. "But I don't just want a second child for me. I want one for my daughter. She asks to be a big sister."

Amanda and Richard now find themselves in the throes of infertility work-ups, blood draws, and doctor appointments. "The impact is similar as though you are having primary infertility," according to Katy obstetrician Selina Lin. "The only difference is that they already have a child. The causes could still be the same. Thankfully, with the improved technology of IUI and IVF, the fertility rate is very good." After studies showed Amanda had low levels of progesterone, her doctor started her on a regimen of Clomid to stimulate

her hormones. If a pregnancy is not produced after four cycles, she will face more extreme measures including possible surgery or advanced reproductive techniques.

While she finds support from her husband who assures her that it's not going to change how he feels about her or Grace, Woodard understandably has tough days. "I believe secondary infertility isn't talked about more because you feel like you are the only one," she says. "Sometimes you feel like

less of a wife, less of a mom." Yet she continues, "I have learned to let God take over as much as I can. With Him all things are possible, and He may not have in his plan what I have in my plan."

Taking On Misconceptions

Kate Brown* echoes similar sentiments in her struggle with infertility just a couple of years after the birth of her first son Jacob. Having recently endured a devastating miscarriage after a year of trying to conceive, she says, "I feel like my body has rebelled against me." One of the biggest misunderstandings she has discovered is well-meaning people assuming just because

they have one healthy child, they can easily have another. "I assumed that, once," she says. "But it's not always true."

Also immensely difficult are the questions people ask her son about whether he would like a new baby brother or sister, to which his response is always an enthusiastic "Yes!" She finds it difficult to hold back the tears when she wants so badly to give him that sibling.

Brown notes another misconception about those suffering with secondary infertility - that their first child isn't "enough" or that they simply aren't grateful for what they already



Richard and Amanda Woodward had no trouble conceiving their daughter Grace, yet have been unable to give her the sibling she desires

"We are so excited to see Kendall in her big sister role and for these girls to know just how much they were wanted."

- DeAnne Hemperley

Derek and DeAnne Hemperley, with their daughter Kendall, who after suffering through infertility for five years, are finally pregnant with twins



have. “I love my family as it is, but there’s something heartbreakingly wrong any time a family wants a child and they can’t make it happen, whether that couple is childless or has 10 children,” she adds.

Overcoming the Odds

DeAnne and Derek Hemperley labored in the trenches of infertility for five years after the birth of their 6-year-old daughter Kendall. Diagnosed with poor ovarian reserve and perimenopause, they turned to donor egg in vitro fertilization (IVF) to realize their dream of another baby. Having endured three failed cycles of IVF, two miscarriages, and one frozen IVF cycle, the Hemperley family finally welcomed their twin baby girls, Chandler Grace and Piper Faith, on April 29.

Still, they are not strangers to the quizzical looks and questions from people who just couldn’t understand why they were going to such extremes to have another child. “Why would you do all that?” DeAnne recalls people asking. “You already have a beautiful daughter.” Yet they never swayed from their desire to provide Kendall a sibling. “Now, she is getting exactly what she asked for,” DeAnne says. “She wanted two baby sisters this whole time.” To their family, that makes the entire journey completely worthwhile. “We are so excited to see Kendall in her big sister role,” she says. “And for these girls to know just how much they were wanted.” **KM**

**Names have been changed to respect the subject’s anonymity*



MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mother who also struggled with infertility. She appreciates these families sharing their stories.

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The Woodwards feel very blessed to have their daughter Grace but still hope to eventually have another child

UPDATE: Since this story was written, the Hemperly’s welcomed twin baby girls into their lives, Chandler Grace and Piper Faith.



Spotlight on Secondary Infertility

Secondary infertility accounts for half of all infertility cases and affects approximately 4 million families.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

- Advanced maternal age
- Male factor infertility
- Endometriosis
- Irregular ovulation
- Recurrent miscarriage

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- Under 35, no conception in one year
- Over 35, no conception in six months

- Source: The Center for Disease Control

If you believe you may be suffering from secondary infertility, talk to your obstetrician about further steps you may need to take. Know that you are not alone – find a trusted confidant to share your feelings.