

how miscarriage

I loved being pregnant with my first child, but after two losses, my next time around felt very different. By Sara Austin



In my dream, I am at a picnic at the lovely home of some unnamed relative, on a manicured lawn surrounded by tall woods. I'm laughing and playing with a gang of nieces and nephews when I'm struck with sudden dread: My daughter is missing. I scramble frantically into the woods, tripping over knotted tree roots, calling for help. But I know it's hopeless. My little girl has wandered off on my neglectful watch. She's gone.

I wake up then with my heart racing, my husband sleeping soundly by my side. My hand immediately goes to my belly; I am ten weeks pregnant with my second child. "She's still there," I whisper. "She's okay. You're okay."

The nightmares, which are all variations of losing a child, began almost as soon as the pregnancy test came back positive. I didn't have to scour my unconscious for an explanation: I'd had two miscarriages in the past six months. I couldn't allow myself to believe things would turn out differently this time.

"Miscarriage takes all the fun out of pregnancy," confided my sister, who'd suffered two losses of her own. I couldn't argue. The first time around, with my now 4-year-old

Anxious about your pregnancy?

Navigate these challenges for a somewhat easier time of it.

WHEN YOU LEARN YOU'RE PREGNANT

Many women **crave privacy** in those early weeks and want to keep their news quiet. Others need a large support team, so they spread the word. Either approach is healthy. I'm a close-to-the-vest type, but I chose to tell anyone who would be on my speed dial in the event I miscarried again.

WHEN YOUR GUY DOESN'T GET IT

"He may not have taken previous losses as hard as you," says Alice D. Domar, Ph.D., executive director of the Domar Center for Mind-Body Health in Waltham, Massachusetts—especially if they were early and, to him, abstract. **Be explicit in what you need from him:** a fun distraction or an ear to listen.

GETTY IMAGES

changed me

daughter, Summer, I'd loved nearly everything about being pregnant. Now, any move to celebrate the pregnancy felt like hubris that would doom it.

I struggled with whether to tell all my friends and family, only to have to share sadness and break their hearts, too, if the pregnancy didn't stick. I resisted the temptation to buy tiny newborn clothes. I couldn't settle on a name—better to keep the baby abstract than turn her into a real person I could lose.

The ultrasound room brought a special terror. I chose my 20-week anatomy screening as the day of reckoning, and told myself that if the baby looked healthy then, my worries could be erased. She did, and it helped. But the fears lingered—past every turn of the calendar, every doctor visit, even as my statistical risk for miscarriage plummeted. Although I felt lighter, I realized I wouldn't be able to truly relax until the baby was safe in my arms.

Because, in truth, it wasn't only miscarriage I feared. After both losses, my doctor told me that I had done nothing wrong. Simply, I was older than I had been the

first time around—on the cusp of 40, an age at which half of all pregnancies end in miscarriage. Something had been faulty with my genetic building blocks, or my husband's, that had caused the pregnancies to fall apart.

This was intended to be comforting, I think, but it had the opposite effect. I became convinced that my eggs were expired, and that even if this new baby made it into the world, she would be unhealthy or unruly or otherwise unlucky. I knew she would be as easy to love as my first—I have seen the unbreakable bond my friends have with their special-needs kids. But I worried she wouldn't be as easy to parent.

When I described my frequent nightmares to a friend, she suggested it might not be my second child I feared losing most. After all, it was Summer who usually went missing in my scenarios. I was and am hopelessly in love with her—her helium-voice

giggles and breathless preschool recaps. I thought about my friend's analysis. Though I'm not proud to admit it, I was, in fact, worried that our second child would be born so damaged that the stress would destroy the happy balance our little family of three had achieved.

As it turned out, my second daughter was born on Christmas

Eve after just five hours of labor. She had one dimple, a blocked tear duct that encrusted her eyes, and a crazy mop of dark hair that called to mind a punk rocker or possibly a hedgehog. In other words, she was

perfect. And I knew that whoever she turned out to be in the future, all of us (even the 4-year-old) could handle it. A family isn't fragile like an egg, but gets stronger with each new layer, like a bird's nest.

When she came into the world, we finally picked a name: Felicity, suggesting both happiness and luck. For the first time in months, I felt overwhelmed with both. ●

It wasn't only miscarriage I feared, but upsetting my firstborn's life.



FIND THE RIGHT WORDS.

To console a friend who miscarried, get advice at americanbaby.com/grieving.

WHEN YOU'RE ONLINE The most helpful support often comes from women who have had a baby after a loss. If none of your friends fits in that category, try joining a Web-based support group. **Look for moderated chats**, such as the ones at Resolve.org, to avoid misinformation or negativity that can make you despair.

WHEN YOU'RE AT THE DOC It's normal and expected for screenings to terrify you if you've heard bad news during an earlier pregnancy. **Remind the technician** about your history; hopefully she will skip right to the good news. Take your partner or a pal with you. If something is wrong, you definitely don't want to hear it alone.

WHEN YOU GET CLOSER TO THE BIRTH "Women think they will feel better after passing a milestone, but it usually doesn't last," says Denise Cote-Arsenault, Ph.D., a nursing professor at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. Instead, **focus on what is going well now**. I used a simple affirmation: Today, I am pregnant.