

Overcoming INFERTILITY

Cy-Fair Families Share Stories of Hope

Written by Kelli Cataline



Infertility isn't a visible mark that can be seen on everyday women doing everyday things. It certainly isn't something that affects all women equally. It's a word that 1 in 6 couples will hear while they're waiting and wondering why they can't conceive.



Amanda and Weldon Ransbarger
tried to conceive for a year
before seeing a specialist



Amanda and Weldon Ransbarger tried for a year to conceive and were frustrated with the fact that the pregnancy test never read positive. They started with temperature charts, which were stressful. Amanda says, “There is a chart of what it is supposed to look like (normal), and then there was mine, which was so random and so not the way it was supposed to be.” Every month she took them to the doctor and got the same response, “Try again.”

That’s when the referral came to see a specialist. “It was a relief,” says Amanda. “Not knowing why was the most stressful thing.” They decided to do in vitro fertilization, IVF, and today they are the proud parents of triplets. Amanda says IVF was emotionally and physically exhausting. She adds, “It’s stressful, but well worth it. We did go through some hard times, but we’re closer because of it.”

Your Not Alone

Infertility can feel incredibly isolating, but the statistics are startling. According to Dr. Sonja Kristiansen, board certified Reproductive Endocrinologist Infertility Specialist and founder and Medical Director of Houston Infertility Clinic, about one in eight couples experience trouble conceiving at some point, whether it is a temporary issue that resolves itself, or a more serious problem requiring treatment. “It’s more common than most people think because traditionally, it’s not been something people were willing to talk about,” says Kristiansen.

In recent years, specialists have seen an increase, worldwide, in the numbers of reported infertility cases, perhaps due in part to couples being more open to discussion and more likely to seek treatment. Stephanie Smith and her husband, Brandon, highly recommend joining a support group like the one offered through the Houston Infertility Clinic at Memorial Hermann Memorial City Hospital. “We learned that we weren’t the only ones going through this. It was so nice to have people around us that really knew how we were feeling and what we were going through. It made it easier to remember that infertility really can happen to anyone,” says Smith. Quite clearly, if you and your partner are experiencing infertility, you are not alone.

Diagnosis and Treatment Options

The reasons behind infertility are as varied as the people affected. Infertility affects men and women equally, and causes can include genetic problems, tubal issues, age, disease, and environmental and societal factors. The most common treatments are infertility pills, hormone injections, and procedures like intrauterine insemination (IUI) and in vitro fertilization (IVF).

After two years of trying to conceive, Smith discovered that she was battling both endometriosis and Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). That diagnosis combined with her age, 35, prompted her doctor to recommend bypassing the more passive treatments and going straight to IVF. After three weeks of daily injections and medications, the Smiths had two embryos implanted. Both survived, and at the end of a successful pregnancy, Stephanie and Brandon happily welcomed baby girls, Brooke and Natalie, into the world.

“IVF is the most successful treatment for infertility because it gives us so much more information to work with,” states Kristiansen, “but it’s important to note that most couples are able to get pregnant using the more simple treatments.” The Voelkels found out that Britney, too, has PCOS. After a prescription for Femara, an

ovulation inducing drug, and two rounds of IUI, the Voelkels had their baby-to-be. Regardless of the underlying causes of infertility, diagnosis and treatment are imperative in conquering it.

The Voelkel's Story

Cy-Fair newlyweds Brad and Britney Voelkel, were looking forward to starting a family. They decided to let nature take its course and went about their lives, expecting no trouble. When two years had passed without a pregnancy, a worried Britney considered her options. She could wait and see, or she could be aggressive and find out what was wrong. Taking a proactive stance from the beginning, she consulted her doctor, and later a specialist. Initial results were discouraging. "I had the IUI (intrauterine insemination) and had lots of hope that this was it ... we were going to be pregnant. But that didn't happen. My test came back negative, like all the other times before," remembers Voelkel.

Riding the Rollercoaster

Couples facing infertility are battling more than just the inability to conceive. The stress of infertility can be the catalyst for a whole host of other issues. Not only are they dealing with the emotional rollercoaster of trying to have a baby, but they are often struggling with their finances and personal relationships in order to continue treatment. "After three years, we decided to give it a rest. Emotionally and financially, we needed a break from all the treatments," admits Voelkel. To ease the budget crunch brought on by costly procedures, ask your doctor about financial aid. There are some programs and incentives out there for those that qualify, and most doctors' offices can help you negotiate with the insurance companies to try and get some procedures at least partially covered. Eventually, taking action paid off. After years of stress, heartache, tests, and procedures, the Voelkels' daughter was conceived, and Addyson Chase will be three in November.

For the emotional and relational stress involved, there are many options. "I started seeing an acupuncturist and an infertility psychologist. Whether the acupuncture helped with my physical conditions or not, it certainly did help me spiritually and emotionally. Those sessions were my time to clear my mind and relax," acknowledges Stephanie.

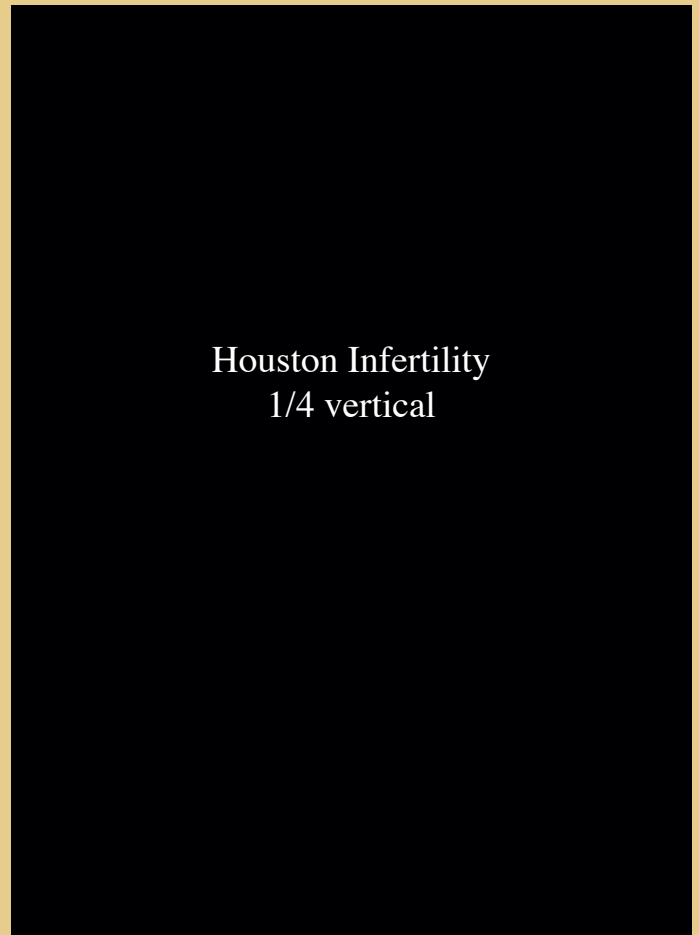
"It's more common than most people think because traditionally, it's not been something people were willing to talk about."

-Dr. Sojna Kristiansen

Getting Support

Hospitals and infertility clinics often host support groups for couples facing infertility. The Internet is home to countless infertility support groups and chat rooms, but it can also be a source of anxiety. Be informed, but don't let infertility take over your life. "Focus on the happy aspects of your life. Enjoy what God has given you, and know that this can work," says Kristiansen. It certainly did for the Smiths and the Voelkels, and hopefully, it will again soon. Little Addyson is asking for a sister! CFM

KELLI CATALINE, her husband, Lou, and their daughters Audrey and Sarah, say "good luck" to Aunt Cristi and Uncle Dennis and Aunt Amy and Uncle Danny. Hang in there!



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