

Lucy's story

I gave birth to my daughter in 2000 and have been unable to conceive a second child since. I have physical symptoms of PCOS and now a blocked tube but I do wonder whether these things have occurred because of the trauma of my only birth experience, and my mixed feelings about a second child.

I am a Type 1 diabetic, who didn't meet a midwife until the antenatal classes. I was seen by a diabetes consultant and an obstetrician in a combined clinic. I have since discovered that they didn't give me much information, didn't really listen to me, and were only interested in weight gain, blood test results and measurements. I wasn't told that all the diabetics were induced at 38 weeks - and afterwards discovered that 75% of us had caesareans in the end.

I was induced without my daughter's head being engaged, and within 30 minutes of the gel being administered she went into distress. I was given oxygen and her heart rate eventually returned to normal. I had contractions every minute until the following morning and 2 doses of pethidine. I was ordered to sleep by an unsympathetic midwife, who the following morning, trying to administer a 3rd dose broke my waters (she didn't believe I was actually in labour). Hooray, I could now have an epidural, because they wanted to put me on an oxytocin drip. The epidural was wonderful - the contractions I had had after the waters broke had terrified me.

Unfortunately the midwife left me too long before catheterising me (we had tried getting to the toilet twice but I couldn't go, and I was on a lot of drips at this point making me "fill up"). When I was eventually catheterised my urine was laden with a lot of blood.

Because of the insulin and glucose drips, my sugar levels were rising and I was annoyed because I had had perfect control throughout my pregnancy.

I was left without examination for a long time and when they bothered to examine me I was found to be fully dilated. So in their infinite wisdom they gave my epidural 2 hours to wear off before allowing me to push. I had had the epidural for over 9 hours at this point and it didn't really wear off. I pushed unsuccessfully for 2 hours before the doctor came to see me.

It was decided that I would have ventouse/forceps in theatre, but someone else would be given a caesarean first.

It was another 2 hours of so before I was taken to theatre. They tried ventouse but the baby's head was too far inside me. When the decision to do a caesarean was made the atmosphere in the theatre changed instantly and was until that moment the scariest in my life. I have no objections to a caesarean and would have been delighted to have been offered an elective one. But this was something else. After being in second stage labour for over 6 hours they finally delivered my daughter. She was blue, grunted and was taken away to be resuscitated. In the hall outside the theatre, my mother witnessed a nurse calling the sister because equipment was missing from theatre and they had a "flat" baby. She was whisked past my face and taken to special care. Luckily my mother went with her. My husband saw more than I did and I am sure was incredibly worried. He also had me shaking on the table to contend with. The whole thing had taken 40 hours. I looked at my notes and they said 16 hours. Later my new obstetrician asked for a report from the old one, and the letter said I was induced because of worries over my blood sugar (untrue) and that I had a 10 hour labour (untrue).

My daughter was bathed and fed (against my wishes), and put on a glucose drip. Hours later I was allowed to hold her for a few minutes - but I was in shock and I don't think I appreciated the opportunity. She was then taken away again. I was put on a ward with other mothers and babies.

My daughter received terrible bruising from the labour, and developed severe jaundice, so we were unable to hold her for a few days whilst she had treatment. She was tube fed, and fed through a drip, as I was made to know that she had hypoglycaemia, which I have found out happens to all babies of women who have a glucose drip in labour. I was made to feel guilty about that, because I am diabetic, and the aim is not to let that happen.

She developed a temperature and had to have a lumbar puncture. She didn't voluntarily move for about 4 or 5 days after the birth, and I think there was some concern over this. She had a brain scan to be on the safe side, and fortunately cranial osteopaths visit twice weekly for free and she was treated by them. I continued this treatment until she was a few months old.

My milk didn't come in until 5 days later, and I felt incredibly ill. I tried to persevere with breastfeeding for 2 weeks but failed at that. She wasn't at all enthusiastic, and we finished with a bottle, which was easier for her but she wasn't too bothered with that either. I don't think my milk came in properly because 2 days after giving up my milk dried up completely. I don't think tube and bottle feeding new babies leaves them hungry enough to breast feed. She didn't even need the formula milk, because she was being pumped full of glucose in a drip.

I know my visitors were visibly shocked when they saw her in hospital.

I am terrified that next time either the baby or I will die. I don't trust obstetricians and midwives to have good judgement, if it was so dangerous for my baby to stay inside me to 40 weeks because of my diabetes, why was it considered safe to put both of us through that ordeal. It took them 40 hours to stop it, I should have had a caesarean at the first sign of distress.

I was poorly after the operation, and very anaemic from blood loss. I also swelled up to larger than when I was pregnant.

My daughter is amazing and I think she recovered unscathed, although she is terrified of doctors and scared of lots of things in life.

I am sorry for my husband because he has to suffer the lack of a second child, but he knows I won't submit myself for IVF. I've tried clomid, scans and now chinese medicine and acupuncture. I don't trust the doctors so I said no to investigative surgery. I feel sorry for my daughter because she deserves a sibling. And I feel sorry for myself because, despite counselling, I still cannot recount this story 4½ years on without crying.

I could go on about this for hours and remember more information, but basically I believe the current system works fine if your baby is going to pop out easily of its own accord. I do not think they should start something (induction) if they are not prepared to monitor you properly and have someone capable of making a good decision available. Why did I have to wait hours for my caesarean? And why could the midwife herself not examine me to see if I was ready push, she said "the doctor said to check you at 5 o'clock". So quite possibly I was in second stage for well over 6 hours.

Funnily enough I do not feel at all guilty. I know that against the odds and medical stereotyping I had produced a very healthy 7lb 11 oz baby (comparable with my own birth weight) and the medical profession had done a pretty good job of trying to kill her.

I don't know where to go from here. We had a narrow escape, but I am a pessimist, and think about what might have been. My mother and sister don't understand (although they try), and none of my friends, for all their big talk of traumatic births, don't understand. None of them thought twice about doing it again.