

Secondary Infertility: will everyone please leave my private matters private?

By Susan Vaughan Moshofsky

I had thought there was no better way to be the recipient of uninvited, meddling advice than to be pregnant. You know: the pointers on what to eat, tips on how to avoid a horrific labor and delivery.

Pregnant six years ago, I thought I'd heard it all. But now, after three years of trying to conceive, I've found the condition that tops pregnancy for attracting unwanted confidences: secondary infertility.

"Your daughter's getting so b-i-i-g," people say. They seem to feel it necessary, after noting our six year-old's growth, to question our family planning: "When are you going to have more?"

"I wish we could," I answer, instantly wishing I weren't quite so honest. "We've been trying for three years..."

"Quit your job. That's what my daughter did," one woman advised. "And in two months, she was pregnant!"

One person pried, "Is Rachel your only one?"

Another asked, in front of Rachel, "Is she IT? Do you have any more?"

I wish I'd said brightly, "Oh, geez, thanks for reminding me! I must have left the other one at home!"

"Don't be so serious," people counsel. "You need to enjoy yourself more. Relax."

Or, "Stop drinking coffee; that did it for me."

And, "Sell all your baby stuff. You know—the crib, the clothes, the toys. We'd been trying for seven years, and right after our garage sale, we got pregnant."

But my favorite is, "Adopt. I know some people who adopted, and right after they brought the baby home, they found out they were pregnant."

There have been jokes about the frequency of our lovemaking and suggestions about way to guarantee that the sperm will hit their target, the best of all being, "Stand on your head. Yeah. Right after you do it, just stand on your head for about a minute."

But I guess what galls me most about all this unsolicited attention is the familiarity it implies, especially when the source is someone I hardly know. Suddenly, here's a mere acquaintance telling me how to go about doing what I consider to be the most personal, private activity I can think of, and then later having the temerity to ask if it worked!

All this advice is hard to take. What's worse is that to cope with it, I can't practice any vice I might in "normal" life, since I'm trying to conceive. No drinking, no caffeine, nothing but Tylenol for a headache; it's worse than the monk-like restrictions imposed during pregnancy because there's nothing—literally—to show for it.

I've skipped that glass of wine with dinner because I might be pregnant—month after month. I've avoided that tall, double cappuccino because caffeine has been shown in some studies to interfere with ovulation.

To detect the exact date of the release of the ovum, I've poured liquids back and forth into little vials, using an extra-sensitive ovulation kit, in search of a blue dot—the little round spot that announces my Lenten living has rewarded us with a ready egg.

I remember one month, I had the flu when the dot came up blue and we "obeyed," with me between bouts of diarrhea and vomiting. Well, the dot was blue and the kit cost \$60, and I wasn't about to waste \$60. That month when I got my period, I wasn't just depressed; I was mad!

But I knew I'd really hit bottom when my daughter joined the ranks of the advice-givers. "Mommy, I wish I had a brother or sister," she said quietly to me one evening while bathing her doll.

"Oh, honey, I know," I began wishing I could quickly slip away and call for help. What to say?

"But you get Mommy and Daddy all to yourself. Just think how lucky you are." My tone reminded me of exactly the one my mother used when explaining to me at a similar age why I couldn't have a Barbie Deluxe Kitchen like my neighbor, Susie Chamberlaine.

"But Mommy, we could adopt," my six year-old replied calmly, smearing the soapy washcloth over her doll's face.

All this advice is hard to take, I thought. If there were an antidote, I'd gladly swallow it.

Problem is, I probably shouldn't—because I'm trying to conceive.