

# When Bruises Fade

*The blessing and trauma of IVF* | By Talia Liben Yarmush

**S** EVEN YEARS AFTER MY LAST EGG retrieval, I recently found myself sitting beside my friend as she prepped for one of hers. Her husband was away for work, and as anyone who has gone through in vitro fertilization knows, timing is everything. Egg retrievals will not wait for a business trip. When she asked me to accompany her, it was a no-brainer. I understood what she was going through. I knew how hope and disappointment are so wound up in each other that they almost become indistinguishable.

My friend lay on a medical cot, in a hospital gown and socks, and when the IV went into her hand, I remembered all the similar lines that had been inserted into mine.

IVF is a blessing. I have two healthy sons because of it. But it isn't without its dark side. I spent years with a bruised belly, courtesy of countless hormone injections. But I couldn't stop, not until I had those boys. In time, the bruises faded, but for years after my last cycle, I had a tiny mark in the corner of the inner fold of my left elbow, the location of my best vein for drawing blood, which is required repeatedly during each IVF cycle. Even that small circle of blue has now disappeared.

Here's what hasn't disappeared: When I see a needle, my whole body reacts. My fists clench, my heart beats faster, sweat accumulates around my hairline and my brain screams, "Run!" My body remembers the assault more than I do.

While you're in the thick of IVF, you don't dwell too much on what you're putting your body through.

If you hope to do it again, you can't get hung up on how many needles you've stuck into yourself, how many vials of blood you've had drawn, how many vaginal ultrasounds you've endured. You just do it and get it over with, because that's your path to motherhood. If you stop and linger, you will never go on. The distorted body you see in the mirror will be too much. The raging hormones will be too much.

But as I watched my friend and the wires she was hooked up to, those reactions flared again, from clenched fists to sweaty neck.

**M**Y LAST EGG RETRIEVAL ultimately resulted in a healthy boy, my now 7-year-old son. But there's more to that story. During that cycle, we transferred two embryos and suffered the early loss of a twin. I still hold the guilt of celebrating the implantation and growth of one embryo while the other disintegrated inside of me.

Then, later in the pregnancy, I received a diagnosis of placenta previa—a condition in which the placenta covers all or part of the cervix, causing bleeding. At 28 weeks, two liters of blood gushed out of me, heralding the impending birth of my son. I almost died the day he was born. I still feel the pain of the scalpel slicing me open as I underwent an emergency C-section. In my dreams, I conjure up my screams of pain, as though I was a witness to the agony and not the woman experiencing it. My three-pound son spent the next eight weeks in the NICU.



Talia with husband, Gabriel, and their sons

Ultimately, IVF is much like a difficult birth. If you remembered all the pain, you'd be hard-pressed to do it again. But what happens when you remember both—the IVF and the birth—in exacting detail? What happens when you can't escape the trauma?

I look at my friend and try to remember that timing is everything. I remember that if that second embryo had lived, neither baby would have survived that birth. I remember that three pounds is a threshold weight, which increased my son's chance of survival. I remember that three surgeries, innumerable injections, endless procedures, hope and disappointment have all conspired to bring me two strong, beautiful boys. I remember that it may have taken seven years, but I was now able to sit with my friend and ignore the voice inside of me screaming to run. **H**

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