

FROM A PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

COLUMN BY JESSICA HEPBURN, AUTHOR OF THE PURSUIT OF MOTHERHOOD

THIS MONTH: FUR BABIES



While you're waiting for something small and pink to arrive, how about a fur baby? A cat? A dog? Maybe even a rabbit? I know it's not a substitute for a real one but it could be worth thinking about just for the practice. After all, it's a perfect way of getting used to dealing with regular feeding times and toilet training. And if for any reason you're worried about the risk of infection if you do get pregnant, what better excuse do you need for getting your other half to clean out the litter tray or carry the poop-a-scoop?

I've not had a pet since childhood but it's something I've been contemplating for a while now. I love animals yet for some reason I've found myself shying away from the commitment. However, in my dream of motherhood (we all have one don't we?) I imagine myself in a farmhouse kitchen making cakes and jam surrounded by children, dogs, cats and maybe even a few chickens. So why haven't I just gone and got the pets while I've been waiting for the children to arrive? I think it's something to do with the fact that one of the sad side-effects of struggling to conceive is that you feel like your life is in limbo. It can be difficult to settle and enjoy the things you do and can have because you're so focused on thinking about the future you want and worrying it will never arrive.

Another great reason for getting a pet is that they are actually good for you. It's official - a research study conducted in America concluded that having a pet reduces stress. In fact, it went on to say that having a cat or a dog in your life does more to reduce anxiety than talking about your troubles with a best friend or spouse. Given that stress and infertility are inextricably linked and that conversations with the people you're closest to can often be a cause of added stress, what better reason is there for getting down to the RSPCA?

Lately I've also heard some lovely stories about couples going through infertility who

claim that the arrival of a pet in their life has been a huge help in their struggle to conceive. Naomi, who runs the online infertility support community *Mindful Mum To Be*, describes how a stray cat came into her and her husband's life last year during the early stages of fertility treatment. They called her Mia and, a year later, she had four kittens around the same time as they were going through their second round of IVF. Their cycle was successful until Naomi very sadly had a miscarriage, but she said that looking after the kittens was a huge focus and factor in helping her through. This is just one of many such stories I've heard.

When I recently blogged about whether I should get a fur baby in my life, I was inundated with online messages of encouragement of how people's pets have made their fertility journey so much easier.

Unfortunately my particular situation is not helped by the fact that we live in a tiny top floor flat with no outside space. It's hardly conducive to a menagerie. I thought about starting a cat-pool... you know, like a feline version of a car-pool, except that cats like their own space and don't like being moved around. Then I read about Lady Dinah's Cat Emporium, London's first ever cat café which opened in March. It's been inundated with bookings already - bag yourself a table and go along for a cream tea and a cuddle with a cat. And very recently I heard about the cat café, borrowmydoggy.com. The marketing says they aim to match dog owners with local borrowers for walks, playdays, sleepovers and happy holidays. It's a perfect way of getting to spend time with a pet if you can't own one yourself. So I signed up and was matched with Elvis the Chihuahua and Pickle the Pug. Apparently they are both up for walks and ear ruffles. I suppose you could see it as a good way of trying out adoption. I'll let you know how I get on!

Jessica's website can be found at thepursuitofmotherhood.com.