

# 'MY PERFECT LITTLE GIRL IS HERE AT LAST'

Angie Baker (left) hit the headlines recently after giving birth to a baby girl after 18 miscarriages. Here, Angie, 33 – who suffers from a condition that affects 15 per cent of women – speaks exclusively to *Grazia*

WORDS: POLLY DUNBAR PHOTOGRAPHS: LOTTIE DAVIES

'When I look at my three-month-old daughter Raiya, it feels like a dream.

I'm sure many new mothers feel the same way, but for me her existence seems nothing short of a miracle. After suffering 18 miscarriages over the course of 13 years, I can't believe she's here at last and that she's really mine.

I've always loved children, so much so that I trained as a nanny after leaving school and longed for the time when I could have my own. I was in my early twenties when I got pregnant the first time. My partner and I were delighted, but our happiness was short-lived. After 11 weeks I started bleeding heavily and, when I went to hospital, they told me I'd miscarried. I was devastated. But after a couple of weeks of crying for what I'd lost, I was more determined than ever to have a baby. I started trying again, reassured by the doctors who'd told me that one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage and that there was nothing to worry about.

Over the next couple of years, I became pregnant very easily four more times, but each time I miscarried at between five and eight weeks. I grieved for the babies, but carried on and tried to

reassure myself that I'd just been unlucky – sooner or later it would happen for me. My GP referred me to a local gynaecologist who ran tests but found nothing wrong, which seemed to prove that all I needed to do was keep trying.

As time passed, I felt increasingly confused about why I kept losing my babies. Especially because the doctors kept saying there was nothing medically wrong with me. But I miscarried again and again and, as time went on, my desire to become a mother spiralled into an obsession. I'd look at other people's babies and feel an almost physical pain. When close friends told me they were pregnant, I was happy for them but I also felt jealous and would think, why not me? I doted on my sister's little girl and a little girl I nannied called Jessica, pouring all my maternal urges into them as if they were my own. But then, at the end of the day, I had to hand them over and go home alone, which was heartbreaking.

When I miscarried for the tenth time, I went to St Mary's Hospital in London for further tests, but again they found nothing. Deep down I knew there was a problem, but I had no choice other than to accept what the experts were telling me. At that stage, my partner and I decided to take a break from trying. The toll it was taking on me emotionally and physically was too much. My partner badly wanted a baby too, but he was worried about me. He could see I was trapped in a destructive cycle of getting my hopes up, only to have them cruelly dashed time and time again. I tried to hide how upset I was, even to him, but when I was alone I'd think about what it would feel like to hold my own baby, and then I'd cry, afraid it would never happen.

I'd had 14 miscarriages by the time I discovered Dr Hassan Shehata. My best friend's mother had ▶

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read an article about his work and passed it on to me. When I read it, I felt more optimistic than I had in years. Dr Shehata had researched women who have repeated miscarriages for no obvious reason. Many of them, he discovered, had a condition known as 'natural killer (NK) cells'. They're a type of white blood cell responsible for protecting the body from viruses. However, they're quite aggressive and some women – up to 15 per cent – have high levels of NK cells, so their body mistakes a pregnancy for a foreign body – such as a virus – and attack it.

'I got a referral from my GP and, a few weeks later, I saw Dr Shehata at Epsom and St Helier University Hospital. He explained I needed to take a year-long break from trying to conceive, then he would run a long series of tests, including one to determine if my levels of NK cells were too high.

'Unfortunately, during my year out, I accidentally became pregnant three more times, miscarrying each time. If I'm honest, I wasn't being as careful as I should have been because, deep down, I was still hoping that all it would take was just one more try. Just before having Dr Shehata's tests, my partner and I talked about what we would do if his treatment failed. I still wanted our own baby more than anything in the world, but after years of disappointment, I thought we should consider other options.

'The blood tests showed what the problem was straightaway: my NK cells were too high, just like Dr Shehata suspected. He assured me that all I needed was a simple treatment involving steroids. The treatment itself, which began at the end of 2008, was horrendous. I was put on a course of steroids, which I took from the start of ovulation for two weeks until my period was due, along with drugs to prevent my blood from clotting. I had to inject myself with a huge needle in my stomach every day, which left me covered in angry bruises. When my period failed to arrive I took a test and, sure enough, I was pregnant. But the steroids had triggered Type 1 diabetes, which runs in my family, and at a five-week scan I discovered I'd lost the baby. It hit me

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harder than ever, but Dr Shehata reassured me that although diabetes had caused me to miscarry, now they knew I had it they could control it with insulin.

'I began treatment again and conceived last March. The moment it hit me that this time was different was during my five-week scan. On the screen in front of me was a tiny blob with a strong heartbeat. Every other scan I'd had before had revealed a similar blob, but a still one, with no heartbeat. This time the heartbeat was clear for everybody in the room to see and I just stared at it. I was overwhelmed and sobbed, unable to believe I was carrying a baby.

'From that point on, I spent every day of the

pregnancy feeling paranoid, worrying that it was too good to be true, although it progressed smoothly. For the first time, I experienced a growing baby bump and felt the baby moving inside me. But

despite all the signs, I was too worried to enjoy it as much as I'd always dreamed of. Even when I looked down at my expanding stomach, I couldn't quite bring myself to believe that I would soon be giving birth to my own child.

'Raiya was born on 9 December 2009, weighing a perfect 7lb. She was induced a week early because of my diabetes and was delivered by Caesarean. When they put her in my arms, and my partner stroked my hand, I couldn't stop shaking from the shock – this perfect little girl was really mine. Since then, I've been living my fantasies, spending my days gazing at her. People keep asking me if I want a brother or sister for her but, at the moment, I'm just so grateful to have one miracle baby.' ■

For more information about Dr Hassan Shehata, visit [www.miscarriageclinic.co.uk](http://www.miscarriageclinic.co.uk) or email [office@miscarriageclinic.co.uk](mailto:office@miscarriageclinic.co.uk)



Angie and her three-month-old daughter Raiya. Below: with her partner

**WHAT ARE NATURAL KILLER CELLS?**

When a woman has high levels of natural killer (NK) cells, she may suffer from recurrent miscarriages (when three or more pregnancies fail to go to term). It's thought that up to 15 per cent of British women suffer from the condition. But studies now show that steroid treatment at conception can dramatically cut the risk of miscarriage.

