

It was a Thursday afternoon when I called to chat with my best friend, Katy. Blaine and I had just come back from a trip to visit his family in Kansas, and she and I were catching up on everything. On top of that, I had been told the day before we left for the trip (which also happened to be my birthday) that I was being laid off from my job due to downsizing within the company.

"I just feel like I'm on an emotional roller coaster," I told her. "I know that I'm stressed about being laid off, and I'm getting ready to start <my period>, but I just feel like I could cry at the drop of a hat."

"You're still not on birth control, right?" she asked.

"No."

"I think you need to take a test."

I laughed out loud and said, "Noooo.....I'm getting ready to start! I mean, I've got cramps and everything. It's just late because I'm so stressed out."

She repeated, "I think you need to take a test."

I paused for a moment. I had been plagued by horrible monthly migraines when on the pill. Plus I had no insurance at the present time. So we had made a joint decision for me to go off of the pill back in February. Today was August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

"You really think I might be pregnant?" I asked, completely stunned by even the idea of it.

"I think it's possible and you need to take a test. The symptoms you are having.....just take a test. And then call me."

"Alright, I'll pick one up on my way home from work and take it tonight," I agreed. And we hung up.

Now I had a feeling of panic in my stomach. I am well aware that, without birth control, pregnancy is possible. But I guess after so many months, I just sort of forgot about that possibility. Blaine and I wanted kids – one day – but we weren't even sure that I *could* get pregnant. After all, I had never really tried before, and I just turned 36. Then again, so many women are waiting until later these days, so women in late thirties and even early 40s are having babies every day. I just couldn't fathom that I might be pregnant.

On the way home from work that night, I stopped by the drug store. The only other time in my life that I remember going to purchase a pregnancy test was in college. Though I was nearly 20 years older and in a loving, committed relationship, I suddenly felt panicked, ashamed, and covert about my mission – as if I was back in college all over again. There were so many choices – digital readings, plus signs, words – what to choose? After all, I still wasn't sure Katy was right about her hypothesis. I mean, we hadn't even been trying per se. We hadn't been preventing either, but wasn't it supposed to require some effort of timing and ovulation and all that for someone my age? Unconvinced that this was really

happening, I went with one of the least expensive ones that was supposed to give a “plus” for pregnant or “minus” for not pregnant.

Blaine has always worked well into the evening (i.e. rarely home before 7 or 8pm), so I had plenty of time to take the test before he got home. I fumbled with the packaging, did a quick glance-over on the instructions, and peed on the stick. It immediately began to change. I checked the package and was perplexed to find that my results didn’t match either of the options on the package. I had a “minus” sign – only it was facing the wrong direction. “Well what the hell does that mean?” I thought to myself. I scoured the instructions to see if I was missing something.

I finally chalked it up to user error and decided to try again in the morning, since the instructions said something about your first pee of the morning being the time to get best results. Good thing the box came with two tests in it! I buried the test I had taken in the bottom of the trash so Blaine wouldn’t see it, and I hid the box with the remaining test. I saw no need to tell Blaine about this, as he would probably just laugh at me for overreacting.

The next morning, I was the first up, as was our usual routine. I slipped downstairs to the bathroom where I hid the remaining test. Again I peed on the stick, and again it changed immediately – to the “minus” sign facing the wrong direction. “What the hell?” I actually said aloud. I hid it in the cabinet in the bathroom and began to go on with my morning routine.

“Should I tell Blaine?” I thought to myself. I wondered if he would be able to decipher it better – not that he had any more experience with pregnancy tests than I did, but maybe he would have an educated guess of what was going on. After much deliberation, I decided I would, indeed, show him the test when he came down.

I didn’t know exactly how to start the conversation, so I just jumped on in.

“Dear, I’m late, so I decided to take a test.”

He laughed. “You’re not pregnant,” he said, which was his typical response anytime I got freaked out that I might actually be pregnant.

“Well.....” I struggled to find the words. “...the thing is, when I took the test, it changed right away, but the picture doesn’t match the instructions. And this is the second test; I took one last night too, and it did the same thing.”

“Let me see it.” He didn’t seem convinced. “It’s a minus,” he stated, very proud of himself.

“Yes, but it’s facing the wrong way. What does that mean?”

“It doesn’t matter. It’s a minus.”

I was becoming very frustrated. “But don’t you think they would illustrate that in the instructions? I mean, this (test) doesn’t match any of the pictures in the instructions!”

Clearly that fact didn't matter to him. He couldn't see past the "minus" sign – regardless of which way it was facing. "You're not pregnant," he stated again. His tone indicated that he thought I was just, once again, overreacting. I decided to give up....for now.

Once I got to work, however, I decided to get answers. I Googled the company who made the pregnancy test and quickly found their "contact us" section. I hastily composed an email explaining the results of my test:

*I had only one strongly visible line in the round window, but it was parallel to the square control window (versus being perpendicular as it is shown in the diagram of how to read results). Does this mean a positive or negative result? Thanks!*

Within 23 minutes, I had a response:

*Thank you for your inquiry. If the Control line (square window) is vertical and blue and the Results line (round window) is also vertical and blue and you read the result within 10 minutes of taking the test, this would be considered positive. The test has detected the hCG hormone in your system.*

Holy Shit! Positive?! Oh. My. God.

I forwarded the email to Blaine at work with the subject line: *Maybe you are a Daddy.* Within minutes, I received a text from him that simply said, "Oh Boy."

I immediately called him back. "What do you think about that?" I asked.

"I think you need to take another test," he answered.

"I can pick one up on the way home for lunch."

"Get the Cadillac of tests – one that says "yes" or "no" so we know for sure," he said. "I don't care how much it costs – I'll pay for it."

"OK. I'll meet you at the house," I said, still in shock.

"Text me when you leave the office."

"OK." And we hung up.

The hours seemed to drag by until lunchtime. I bolted out the door just after noon, texted Blaine, and headed to the drugstore just around the corner from our house. I decided on a digital test that was supposed to give a clear reading of "yes" or "no". There were two tests in a box for about \$20 or so. I quickly paid and raced home. I had just made it inside when Blaine pulled into the driveway.

"Did you take it yet?" he asked as he burst into the house.

"I just got here – about to take it now," was all I could manage to say.

I gave the instructions a once-over and then sat down to pee. The little timer on the digital screen began flashing, indicating it was working. I finished up, sat it down on the edge of the bathtub, and walked away. Blaine was waiting for me outside of the bathroom, and we began pacing the floor as we kept an eye on the clock for two minutes.....two agonizing minutes.

At the end of the two minutes, we both ran into the bathroom, looked at the test, and simultaneously exclaimed, "Oh shit!"

This was an “oh shit” moment for many reasons. For one, we were not yet married. We had talked about getting married, but he had not yet proposed, and therefore a date for tying the knot was not in the near future. Secondly, I had just found out about 10 days prior that I was about to be laid off from my job. The company had run into financial troubles and had decided to downsize. Since my position was relatively new and had been a sort of “test” position anyway, I was easy to remove. Finally, I had no health insurance. The company I worked for did not provide it, and due to a pre-existing heart condition, I was unable to get it on my own. Sure, we wanted kids, but this timing was terrible. And yet, it was our own fault for being so careless with birth control (or lack thereof).

Yep, it said in big, clear, digital print: “YES”.

No mistaking with this test – I was, indeed, pregnant. Tears began to well up in my eyes, and I wasn’t sure if they were tears of joy or fear – or maybe a little of both. I think we both circled around a few times in disbelief and shock, and then we hugged. We had no words. I think Blaine said something to the effect of, “We’ll get through this” or “We’re a team” or something equally supportive and encouraging. All I could think was, “Thank God this is Friday,” because that meant I only had to get through a few more hours at work, and then we would have the weekend to process all of this.

When I got back to work, my boss was already gone for the day, traveling to one of our more distant locations. (I worked for a restaurant group that had multiple locations throughout northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia.) As luck would have it, he wouldn’t be back for the rest of the day, so I had the office to myself – time to myself to try to begin to process the fact that I had a little baby growing inside of me.

I called Katy first. After all, she was the one who had suggested that I take a test in the first place.

“That’s great news!” she exclaimed. Already a mom of two boys, she was super excited that we could now share “mom” stories and such. “I know you’ve been wanting this for a while. I’m so happy for you!” Had I? I had been so back and forth about kids – didn’t want them for a long time, then thought I might but was scared due to my heart condition. (I was born with a mild heart murmur – an aortic stenosis, specifically, which is a narrowing of the aortic valve. Fortunately, mine had remained mild and had not posed any issues thus far, but something as strenuous as a pregnancy could change that, especially given my age.) Had I somehow indicated to others that I really wanted to be a mom? Because right now in my head, I just wasn’t sure at all.

“How far along are you?” she asked, a perfectly logical question.

“Well.....” I searched for an answer. “I’m about 10 days late, so maybe 5 or 6 weeks...? Then again, my last period was shorter and lighter than usual, so maybe I was already pregnant then.” Truth was, I really had no idea at all. Had we have actually been trying to get pregnant, I might have kept track a little better. As it turned out, I was lucky to even have remembered when my last period started. Ironically enough, I had actually just decided last month to start making note of my cycle. So I ran down a list of symptoms and signs with her – my last migraine, cramps, etc – trying to nail down a time frame. My best guess was somewhere between 6-10 weeks.

Next up was my mother. Blaine and I decided we weren’t going to tell anyone else yet, until we took a legitimate test with a medical facility, and maybe not even then. But I had to tell Katy. Not only was she my best friend of the past 18 years (we were college roommates), but she is the reason I even took the test to begin with. And I had to tell my mom. I mean, isn’t that what daughters are supposed to do? Plus, my mom had been chomping at the bit to have grandkids. She hadn’t put pressure on any of us kids, but I just knew she wanted grandkids so very badly. This news would make her day – no, her YEAR. Maybe even her *lifetime*.

She answered and asked her usual opening question, “What’s up?”

“Well.....” I started. “It’s not for sure yet, but we think I might be pregnant. I took a couple of tests, and they were positive, but I’m going to the health department on Monday to be sure. But.....yeah.....I might be pregnant.”

“Oh my gosh, Jenny, that’s GREAT!” she exclaimed. “How far along are you?”

Here we go – *that* question again. I was sort of embarrassed that I had no idea, but I ran through all the things I had discussed with Katy. She had no better advice or feedback than Katy did. Guess I was going to have to wait until we saw the doctor to get the answer to that one.

“Well I’m just so excited for you!” she said. In my head I was thinking, *“Let’s be honest, Mom: you’re pretty darn excited for yourself – you’re getting the grandchild you’ve always wanted.”*

Thank goodness the phone calls took up much of the rest of my afternoon, and before I knew it, 5:00 had rolled around. While I wasn’t one to really watch the clock on the job, today was an obvious exception. Plus, it was Friday. And the boss was gone. And given that I was being laid off one week from today, I didn’t really care much anymore anyway.

My head was spinning by the time I got home. I began making a list in the notes section of my phone of anything pertinent I could remember that might help us nail down the time of conception:

- *First migraine since February was 6/18-6/20*
- *Period was 6/24 or 6/25, but was lighter and shorter*
- *Start of migraine again week of 7/10-7/13 (off and on since then)*
- *Sore nipples (not entire breast) for last couple of months*
- *Dreams about being pregnant and having a baby during the last month*
- *Felt faint/sick at Braves game 6/30 (thought it was heat)*
- *Felt faint/sick on the way home from trip to the mountains on 7/22 (thought it was a panic attack)*
- *Cramps started around 7/23-7/24, but still no period*

Now, you’re probably reading this list and thinking “Duh!” Well, as I started listing it all, I sort of had the same reaction. But as I was going through it all, one-by-one, I had no clue whatsoever. In fact, now thinking about how long I may have been pregnant, I was beginning to feel extremely guilty about the drinking I had done on our vacations and festivities during the summer.