

Next week:  
actress Jodie  
gets Carter



**Parenting: Bridget Galton**



■ Marje Isabelle and her daughter, Sienna

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# Check your fertility age

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Marje Isabelle was just 30 when she visited a private gynaecologist.

The charity fundraiser from Highgate was worried that her mother had gone through early menopause at 39 and knew her GP would wave away her concerns.

But the specialist put her mind at rest: "She laughed me out of her office and said there was no reason why a fit, healthy, slim woman couldn't get pregnant."

Four years later, after struggling to get pregnant and enduring nine months of tests, Isabelle was diagnosed with endometrial cancer.

During the hysterectomy, surgeons discovered ovarian cancer and removed one of her ovaries.

Isabelle's story had a happy ending. She and her doctor husband requested a one month delay to the surgery while they went through self-funded IVF to create six precious embryos.

Her cousin offered to carry their biological baby and when Sienna was born by water birth at The Whittington Hospital six months ago, Isabelle caught her as she emerged.

"She came into my arms, I fed her donated milk and she was completely mine from the moment she was born," says the 37-year-old.

"If I hadn't been trying for Sienna I wouldn't be speaking to you today. She saved my life."

Now Isabelle has set up a two-pronged service so that other women are better informed than she was.

She feels she was given very little information before such drastic surgery and wants to offer advice to other women in the same position.

"Infertility, IVF and surrogacy, there is nowhere easy for couples to go. A 34-year-old childless woman has gynaecological cancer and the surgeon wants to remove everything immediately with no process around trying to save her fertility and no funding for IVF from the NHS.

"It was an extremely stressful tense time for us and I really want women who find themselves in that situation to have some guidance and their hand held. To be referred to experts who will fight their cause."

She also wishes that, given her family history, the private specialist had carried out basic hormone tests to indicate her fertility.

"If she had found out a bit more it might have flagged up a bigger problem or given me more time to try for a baby."

The second strand of the service offers men and women and men one off or annual tracking tests to determine their "fertility age".

"Unfortunately fertility levels decline from 25 onwards. It reveals how fast that's happening for you.

"I am trying to raise awareness that healthy people - even twentysomethings who take it for granted they will be able to have children - should be proactive, find out where they

are on that fertility scale so they make informed decisions about their life.

"If they have time, that's great; if they don't, it's best finding out earlier rather than later so they can get help."

Although Isabelle got together with her husband as a teenager, they didn't want to start trying earlier for a baby because "we were having too much fun in our 20s".

"In hindsight, I wish there had been a service that could have tracked my fertility before I was interested in getting pregnant. Testing would have flagged up any anomalies, resulted in earlier intervention and given me the information to make decisions around my fertility.

"I am not chastising women who 'leave it too late'; we live in modern times, people get married and have children later. I am just saying be aware, know your fertility figures so you can do something about it."

Fertility Matters is run from her husband's Harley Street practice and as well as being CEO, Isabelle is also caring for Sienna.

"The cancer, the IVF, not having a big belly in front of you for nine months to pat and coo over; it was all a difficult time.

"But the birth was a beautiful ending. She's very good and smiley, a fantastic little personality and a very special baby."

■ Female comprehensive testing is £495. Visit [fertiilmatters.co.uk](http://fertiilmatters.co.uk)