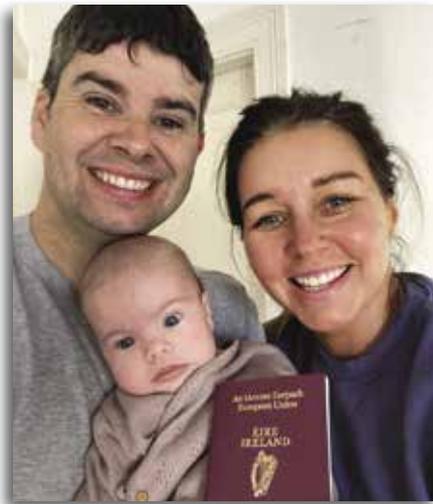


Facing pre-eclampsia in a diabetes pregnancy

World champion kickboxer Catherine Brady became a mother after facing several challenges during pregnancy and birth, writes **Deborah Condon**



Catherine Brady with husband Paul and daughter Afia

Pregnancy, like diabetes, does not always go to plan. World champion kickboxer, Catherine Brady from Dundalk, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes almost two decades ago at the age of 20. Having won four of her five world championships after her diagnosis, it is fair to say that she has a very good understanding of her body and what works for her. However, her pregnancy journey turned out to be a complicated one.

Sadly, in April 2020, Catherine suffered a miscarriage. She explains that at the time, she and her husband had faced an incredibly stressful time due to the death of her father-in-law and her own father being diagnosed with a serious illness. As a result of this stress, she wasn't being as diligent with her blood glucose levels as usual. However, she was extremely upset when a consultant in the maternity hospital she was attending blamed the miscarriage on poorly managed diabetes.

"Covid had recently hit so my husband wasn't allowed to come in with me – I was told this news on my own. There are so many reasons you can have a miscarriage and sometimes there is no reason at all, but I was told it was my diabetes. In

other words, it was my fault. I felt so vulnerable. The situation was handled very poorly," she recalls.

As a result, when she became pregnant again in the summer of 2021, she switched to a different maternity hospital.

Prior to getting pregnant this time, Catherine "put a lot of work" into getting her diabetes management steady. However, further into the pregnancy, she developed pre-eclampsia, a dangerous complication that results in high blood pressure, protein in the urine and other symptoms such as swelling in the hands, legs and feet.

Diagnosed with pre-eclampsia

One Sunday morning in February 2022, at 31 weeks, she went into hospital because she felt "awful". Her blood pressure was very high and there was lots of protein in her urine. She was given steroids to bring on her baby's lungs while staff worked to control her blood pressure. At 3am that night, the medical team said that they could not get her blood pressure down.

"They said, 'the baby will be coming in

the next three or four...' – I thought they'd say weeks, but they said 'hours'. I couldn't believe it," she says.

Around eight hours later, Catherine's daughter, Afia, was born. She was nine weeks early and was brought straight to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

While she spent a total of four weeks in hospital, Afia had no health concerns other than the fact that she was born so prematurely. Aside from her daughter coming early, Catherine also found the birth stressful because of her diabetes. Once she was being prepped for the birth, her glucose levels started to rise.

"I didn't want to be going into the delivery with high bloods. I was anxious about getting insulin in because it didn't work as quickly as it would had I not been pregnant. Usually it takes 10-20 minutes to work depending on the time of day but in pregnancy, it might take two hours to work," she explains.

She hadn't yet written a birth plan and felt that there was "a huge amount of hesitancy from the nurses because they didn't know what to do and I didn't either as it was my first baby".

Catherine also found the initial period after the birth stressful.

"The advice you are given in relation to your diabetes is to try and go back to the way you were before you got pregnant. I think there needs to be more support than that. Women don't know what is happening to their bodies or what to expect from one week to the next. Everybody is different but there should be some sort of guidelines as to what could possibly happen and how to handle it if it does," she adds.

Thankfully, despite the challenging pregnancy and birth, Catherine and Afia are well and healthy.