



second time around

Awaiting the birth of baby No. 2, this mother discovers the challenges (and advantages) of knowing what to expect. > BY JENNA McCARTHY

“CONGRATULATIONS,” whispers the elderly lady behind me, nodding at my massive middle. “Your first?”

“No,” I shake my head with a knowing look that all but implies that I have incubated dozens—possibly *hundreds*—of offspring. The truth is, I have given birth to one daughter, Sophie, and her new sister is threatening to emerge any minute now. I realize that this hardly qualifies me as a professional procreator, but I’m no rookie either.

While I spent roughly 39½ of the 41 weeks I was pregnant with Sophie thinking and worrying obsessively about the delivery, it wasn’t until my eighth month this time around that it even *occurred* to me that I was going to have to birth a live human being again. It’s not like the maiden voyage was such a joy ride that I should have no cause for concern. But I learned that stressing about every possible outcome has zero effect on what actually goes down in the delivery room. (And if I may be so bold, it’s one day out of your life! You’re better off preparing for the 18 years that come immediately afterward, because *that’s* when you’re going to need some help.)

While this pregnancy has seemed to go a lot faster, in many ways it’s been twice as hard. Thanks to an unfortunate phenomenon I call Uterine Muscle Memory, I began to “show” sooner, which means I’ve been sporting my trusty under-the-belly jogging suit since about 30 seconds after the positive pregnancy test. (Finding the time or energy to actually *jog* in it has been another matter altogether.) By now, the novelty of doll-sized booties and butter-soft blankets has worn off, which

probably is a good thing, as chasing a tireless toddler around means I no longer have untold hours to spend rearranging these items in an overdecorated nursery. (The truth is, this kid will be lucky if her crib is assembled and outfitted with clean sheets by the time she arrives.) And—silly me—I thought debilitating morning sickness and crippling fatigue were challenging when I could crawl into bed and stay there for days on end. This time, I struggle to keep a smile on my face as I serve up an endless supply of smelly finger foods and engage in the day’s 37th rousing chorus of “Ring Around the Rosie.”

And yet, making the leap from novice to veteran also has its rewards. I don’t worry as much about getting my body back, partly because it happened effortlessly after Sophie (thank you, nursing), and partly because having a perfect body isn’t quite so high on my priority list any more. When Sophie’s due date came and went without her debut, I thought the anticipation would kill me. It’s hard to feel that kind of urgency when—as unfun as pregnancy can be—I now know it’s even harder once the baby is *outside* your body. I’m not obsessed with accumulating all the latest/greatest/most-expensive baby gear, as I doubt my new baby will realize that her older sister drooled on *her* car seat/highchair/ExerSaucer first, and I don’t plan on telling her.

Most of all, I no longer question my ability to mother, because I have a beautiful, brilliant, kindhearted little daughter who proves to me every day that I’m doing a great job. ☺

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