

Fighting fibroids

After two miscarriages due to fibroids, Audrey Mutare shares how she was finally able to carry to term.

As a young woman, I always battled with heavy periods, anaemia, back pain and a protruding belly.

Regardless of how much I exercised or how healthy my diet was, my stomach never shrank.

After my first miscarriage in 2014, I was diagnosed with fibroids. My mother had a history of the condition, which led to her having a hysterectomy. My gynaecologist at that time told me I wouldn't be able to conceive, let alone

carry full-term, so my only option was a myomectomy (a surgical procedure to remove uterine fibroids). I wanted to preserve my uterus, so I decided against it. In 2015, my back pain flared up and I had to have an operation to relieve a pinched nerve. At the back of my mind, I had always wondered if my bad back was caused by the fibroids. In September of the same year I conceived again, but had another miscarriage. I had my first uterine fibroid embolization (UFE), which involves blocking the blood vessels feeding the fibroids, in January 2016 and experienced immediate relief. My period became lighter, I wasn't in so much pain and the fibroids shrank significantly. In September 2016, I discovered I was pregnant again.

I had to keep reminding myself to stay calm, because I was scared of having another miscarriage. My first and second trimesters were smooth sailing, but the third was difficult. As my baby grew, so did the fibroids. I experienced incredible pain

during the final few weeks. I was in and out of hospital for pain control. My gynae told me that due to the big fibroids, I had an increased risk of needing a C-section, because they could affect my

contractions. Even with that information, she was willing to support me in having a natural birth.

I was prepared for anything on the day of delivery, but my worst

fear was bleeding out after delivery and a possible hysterectomy.

At 35 weeks, I went into preterm labour, but the doctors were able to stop the contractions so my baby would have a few more weeks to grow. Thankfully, at 40 weeks, I was induced and gave birth to Zoe Zuvarashe Chakaipa via C-section.

I decided to have surgery to remove the fibroids, which was coupled with

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another UFE. Again, I experienced immediate relief and was able to be the best mom possible to my then three-month-old baby. I hope to stay fibroid free and be a voice for other women who are silently battling the condition. **LL**

FIBROID AWARENESS

Help raise awareness around this life-threatening condition by joining a round-table discussion with The White Dress Project, founded by Tanica Gray, whose mom suffered from fibroids and lost two sets of twins as a result. The main aim of this initiative is to educate and empower women through research and advocacy. The project is also dedicated to raising funds for research and awareness of uterine fibroids. For more information and to find out more about fibroids, visit thewhitedressproject.org.

Share your Birth Story with us. Email your story to livingandloving@caxton.co.za with 'Birth Story' in the subject line, and your experience could be published in our magazine.