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Country living

Teeny Sweeney bringing joy to optimistic Claire

Claire Sweeney has achieved her dream of motherhood at the age of 43. She tells **Gabrielle Fagan** about her joy after two miscarriages

Claire Sweeney is happy to report that miracles do happen – the baby she is expecting is one of them.

She's 43 – an age at which most women would assume motherhood had passed them by – and is expecting her son this month.

"Finding out I was pregnant was a gorgeous shock – it truly shows that God works in mysterious ways," says the Liverpoolian, who originally found fame on *Brookside* and has since been a TV presenter, *Loose Women* panellist, and starred in the West End.

"I've thought about calling him Gabriel, because he's my little angel sent from Heaven."

Even the fact that her personal life is far from settled – she and the father, marketing consultant Daniel Reilly, 29, broke off their engagement shortly before she discovered she was pregnant – doesn't appear to have dented her obvious contentment.

"Dan couldn't have been better, he's so supportive. He will be there at the birth, which will be in Liverpool. I'm just enjoying these last few weeks before the birth because I know I won't have much time to myself after that," says Sweeney.

Her pregnancy joy is even more profound, she reveals, because she suffered two miscarriages, one at 12 weeks in 2012 and another shortly after conceiving in May last year.

"While I was very fatalistic about my first one and just told myself the pregnancy wasn't meant to be, the second one was so much harder. But I've always wanted to be a mum and despite my age and the miscarriages, I stayed really philosophical. I had a friend who got pregnant at 46, and I knew it could happen.

While Sweeney – who conceived naturally, contrary to the rumours – now looks relaxed and glowing, she confesses she found the first three months worrying.

"I was really scared and anxious. I wrapped myself up in cotton wool because of the miscarriages and wouldn't do anything, barely even going out. I also had to wait for the results of tests for any abnormalities. So all in all, it was a nerve-racking time."

She's looked after her health throughout with advice from experts at the first online antenatal fitness platform, Results With Bump, on which she appears exercising and doing yoga.

"When you're pregnant for the first time, you're not really sure what you can or cannot do as, above everything, you want to protect this precious baby. I wanted to exercise but didn't know what or how much," says Sweeney, whose trouble-free pregnancy has only been marred by shoulder pain and carpal tunnel syndrome.

"The team calmed my nerves and eased me into a workout which really helped improve my sleep, posture and relieved my back strain and gave me advice about nutrition to minimise tiredness."

It all seems enviably organised and within three months of the birth, Sweeney will, baby-in-tow, appear in pantomime as the genie in *Aladdin* at the Liverpool Empire.

"I'm so lucky with my job as it's not nine-to-five. I can take the baby to the theatre and will be staying at home with my family, so they can help out."

Down-to-earth and patently eagerly anticipating her new role in life she says: "I've always believed in going with the flow and don't think you can make too many plans as you never know what's going to happen. It's exciting and I will just wait and see what happens and cope with it."



Claire Sweeney with Vicky Holmstock, co-founder and ante-natal yoga expert for Results with Bump



Janet Hughes recommends

10 things to do this week

1 Make a roast to be reckoned with: Game such as partridge, mallard and pheasant is coming into season – so head to a local farm shop to create a delectably comforting seasonal dish.

2 Sloely does it. Scour the hedgerows for sloes, collect a big bowlful, prick holes in each fruit and pop into a bottle of gin for a deliciously wicked winter drink.

3 As the leaves begin to fall, don't be disheartened. Instead, get creative with the kids. Collect a big bundle and enjoy an afternoon of leaf craft.

4 If you'd rather forage for something more fruitful, now's the time to get blackberry picking. Bejewel a dessert, or combine with cooking apples to create that favourite – the fruit crumble.

5 Burn off some of that blackberry crumble with a leisurely bike ride through the lanes.

6 Otherwise you could just stay cosy... As the days grow chillier and nights longer – it's time to snuggle up with a blanket and a good book.

7 Books not your cup of tea? Make yourself a hot chocolate and settle down with a classic film. For the best autumnal scenes in cinema – choose from *When Harry Met Sally*, *Dead Poets Society* or *Good Will Hunting* (otherwise you could just watch them all)

8 Take a turn about the grounds. As the seasons begin to change, there's no better time to take in the spectacular views at the National Trust's Stourhead in Wiltshire.

9 It's a truth universally acknowledged that there is no greater pleasure in life than devouring a home-made cake in front of *Great British Bake Off* repeats.

10 With all of these wonderful seasonal changes taking place on your doorstep, crack out your camera – and send your shots to writerspictures@b-nm.co.uk.