

# Pregnant, with cancer

When you're risking your life to have a child, you have a lot more than baby names on your mind. *Glamour* staffer and leukemia patient Erin Zammett Ruddy opens up.

At four months. Already so cute!



In 2001 Erin Zammett Ruddy, now 28, was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML), a cancer that until recently proved fatal for many patients. For five years, she's chronicled her experiences: her miraculous remission, her sister Melissa's devastating diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma, her deep desire to have a child. Now eight months along, Erin's excited—but scared.

Wow: My baby's the size of a giant eggplant! It's also been an avocado and a zucchini (according to babycenter.com, my new addiction). I still find it pretty strange to think I have something—hopefully *not* produce—growing inside me. I'm due September 1, and it's a boy! For those of you who haven't been reading my glamour.com blog (um, why are you not reading my blog?!), let me catch you up: Last fall, my husband, Nick, and I made the tough and controversial decision to get pregnant. Controversial because I had to go off Gleevec, the drug that keeps me in remission (taking it while pregnant isn't recommended).

Nick and I did months of research and had endless meetings with doctors and many late-night discussions. Ultimately we agreed that because I was deep in remission, we'd give old-fashioned pregnancy a shot instead of adopting. Did Dr. Mauro, my oncologist, think it was the best idea ever? No. Did he think he could find a way to treat the cancer if it came back during pregnancy? Yes.

My family stayed uncharacteristically close-mouthed about our choice, though my dad did joke about being



perfectly happy with one grandkid, my sister Melissa's son. "What's wrong with Andrew?" he'd say, then change the subject. I knew they were worried, but like my friends, they were behind me. What I didn't expect was being slammed by everyone *else's* feelings on the subject.

## The hate mail hits

When I wrote a column last summer about wanting to stop taking Gleevec to have a baby, letters poured in. Readers begged me to adopt, telling me I'd be crazy to risk my life. The e-mail that got to me the most: "Frankly, it disturbs me that you value your own life, and your husband's commitment, so little that you would risk everything so that your eggs may be fertilized. How selfish."

Crushed, I immediately forwarded it to Nick. His reply: "Tell her your husband is forcing you to do it. Say he needs a natural-born heir to his enormous Flint, Michigan, fortune." This is why I love Nick. I laughed out loud (there is no fortune) and thanked God that I have someone as supportive and silly as he is to go through this with.

Even though it was a lot to endure, the onslaught of negative comments didn't deter me one bit, mostly because Nick and I had already debated a lot of these points ourselves. Adoption is a wonderful option—and may be something we



Me (center) with my big sis and my mom, pregnant with Meghan

on getting pregnant that I hadn't really considered what it would be like to be off my cancer drug for nine whole months. What if my disease came back? Dr. Mauro had reassured

me there was pregnancy-safe chemo I could do, but *chemo*? I couldn't even bring myself to drink coffee!

Those first few months Nick and I didn't talk much about what life with a baby would be like, for fear of jinxing things. We told only family and a few close friends. It was nice to fantasize about meeting up for brunch, me with our group's first baby in tow, but I always qualified our talks with "If things go well..." Otherwise, I felt like I was tempting fate. Once you're diagnosed with cancer at 23, you come to expect bad things to happen to you. One friend joked that I had prepartum depression, and I probably did.

This wasn't the joyride I'd expected. Wasn't I the girl who wanted to be pregnant so badly she'd risk her life? Why wasn't I picking out bibs and baby names? Friends had said the second I conceived I would fall in love with my baby-to-be. I definitely *liked* it, and wanted to keep it safe, but I had a hard time calling it anything other than "it."

By the time I hit 12 weeks, I felt like less of a mental case. I was sharing the baby news with more people and even letting myself think about a crib (we have a one-bedroom apartment, so instead of a nursery, the little guy will get a corner). The chorus of "Congrats!" made it all seem doable. That and Nick constantly saying, "I'm so proud of you."

### ***So far, so good***

Luckily, pregnancy's been kind to me. I haven't had any nausea, I've got plenty of energy and most important, my cancer is still undetectable. Once a month I ship my blood (overnight and on ice) for testing to Dr. Mauro. Each time, as I wait for his call with the results, the gravity of what I'm doing hits me. I'm pregnant. With *cancer*. Every woman I've spoken with who went off Gleevec to get pregnant relapsed, although I'm already further along than they were when their cancer came back.

I'm very attached to the baby these days. Feeling him move is amazing, and I could stare at the sonogram pictures for hours. Yet I still think of the "I told you so" factor: If I relapse

or the Gleevec doesn't work as well when I start again (another risk), will the writers of those harsh letters think, Told you so? Will Dr. Mauro torture himself for giving me the green light? Will I regret my decision?

Two things save me when I go to these dark places. The first is Andrew, my nephew, who gets cuter by the day; he thinks the baby should be named Andrew or Shrek. Imagining having my own little guy to love makes my heart feel like it will overflow. And then there's Nick. When my mind is racing with all the what-ifs, I always find a way back to his arms and remember that whatever happens, we'll have each other and we will be OK. ©

To read Erin's past columns, visit [glamour.com/health](http://glamour.com/health).

consider in the future—but for now we wanted to try to experience giving birth to a child we created. We pressed on.

### ***Big (and scary) news***

We began by seeing a fertility specialist to make sure all systems were a go and because Dr. Mauro, who's in Portland, Oregon, wanted someone to watch me closely from the beginning. Nick had his semen analyzed (he really loved that), and I had all of my pertinent parts examined.

Fortunately we had no problem conceiving. Right before Christmas, I went to the doctor for a pregnancy test; because we needed to find out early to minimize the fetus' exposure to Gleevec, I couldn't just use one of the EPT kits I had stashed at home. I was at work that afternoon when I got the doctor's call; I was three weeks along. I started laughing and saying, "Oh my God." Then I teared up and called Nick. He was so shocked all he could say was "You're kidding!" That night we went out for Italian to celebrate—and I started eating for two.

Later, at home, I tucked my bottle of Gleevec into the medicine cabinet, and the anxiety set in. Even though I'd felt secure about my decision, I had been so focused

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