

It's common knowledge that, once you've passed the 12-week mark in a pregnancy, it's safe to announce your exciting news to the world. Which is exactly what English model and TV personality Kelly Brook, 31, did when she found out she and her new boyfriend, rugby player Thom Evans, were to become parents. In March, she tweeted, "Thom and I are happy to announce we are expecting a baby girl. We're delighted."

But just two months after sharing her news with the world, Kelly lost her unborn daughter when she was five months' pregnant. Kelly isn't the only British celeb to go through the horrific experience of losing her baby well after the supposedly "safe" 12-week mark - Lily Allen's unborn

THE 12-WEEK MYTH

Why are so many women losing their unborn babies in the later stages of pregnancy?

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son died at six months' gestation last November, and *Britain's Got Talent* judge Amanda Holden lost her baby boy in February, seven months into pregnancy.

"The whole thing has been a huge journey," Kelly says. "There are so many stages of bereavement that I'm still going through. You feel sadness, guilt, loss, emptiness. I take it one day at a time. One moment you don't think about it, the next you're crying hysterically."

MISCARRIAGE VS STILLBIRTH

Although they were often referred to as miscarriages in the media, all three women actually had stillbirths, not late-term miscarriages. "Any baby that is lost after 20 weeks, or that is over 400 grams, is officially called a stillbirth," explains gynaecologist Professor Michael Bennett, an internationally recognised pregnancy loss expert (alanahealthcare.com.au). "Legally, the cut-off between a miscarriage and a stillbirth is 20 weeks. From this time, the baby is registered as a birth and a funeral is arranged. But, for a couple who loses their baby at 19 weeks, for example, it's still very hard. To them it's a little boy or girl who they have hopes and aspirations for, but in medical terms, we call it a miscarriage. A few days later and it would've been a stillbirth."

Adding to the trauma of stillbirth and late-term miscarriage is the fact that in most cases, women are advised to give birth to the baby to protect their future fertility and avoid the painful recovery associated with a caesarean. "After 16 weeks, we normally induce labour, which is a harrowing experience," says obstetrician Dr Rahul Sen (rahulsen.com.au). "Women in that situation just want it over with. The problem is that the body is designed to go into labour at around 40 weeks, so getting it to go into labour at 16 or 18 weeks is difficult, particularly for women who haven't had babies before. We give them hormones to induce labour. It usually takes about 24 hours, but it can often be a few days and it's important to warn women of that."

TABOO SUBJECT

It's estimated one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage or stillbirth. Stats reveal that 2,188 babies were stillborn in Australia in 2008. While some late-term miscarriages and stillbirths can be attributed to factors like chromosomal abnormalities (like Down syndrome) or placental insufficiency (when the placenta isn't providing enough nutrients), the sad fact is, the underlying cause often remains unknown.

That was the case for Stephanie Wade, 30, who gave birth to stillborn girl Sybella in April 2010 "We ran over 2,000 tests after Sybella died, but all were inconclusive - we weren't given a reason," says Stephanie. "Stillbirth didn't enter my mind during the pregnancy; she just looked so perfect in every ultrasound."

Emma McLeod, founder of the Stillbirth Foundation, believes there isn't enough awareness of stillbirth and research into its causes, compared to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

"I liken stillbirth to what SIDS used to be," says McLeod. "Thirty years ago, we didn't talk about cot death, but since then, we've raised money, funded research and saved many lives. As a community, we need to start talking about stillbirth."

Louise Leah, 31, had two stillbirths (babies Ella and James) before having healthy baby Chloe. She said the isolation and guilt she felt owed to the fact that baby loss is "still a taboo subject". "I want women who experience this to know that they aren't alone," says Louise. "There's hope - you're stronger than you think."



Lily Allen (left) and Kelly Brook



STILL LOVED

Jeda Symonds-Poynton, 26, and her husband, Anthony, lost their daughter to stillbirth at full term.

"I'd never heard anything about stillbirth before our daughter Kayla. Two days before I went into labour, I actually went to see my doctor. I was about a week overdue so I had a check-up and was told everything was okay. However, when I went to hospital in labour, they put the monitor on my stomach and they couldn't find the heartbeat. The lady [doing the ultrasound] said, 'I'm not really good at this, I might get another machine'. She went and got another one and also another midwife, and then a doctor came in.

It doesn't seem real when you hear that your baby is dead. You have to let that sink in and then you think, 'I've got to give birth to this baby!'. At first, I was like, 'Knock me out and give me a caesarean'. The doctors told me that if I gave birth, it'd be better for my future babies, and I thought, 'Future babies? I want *this* baby! I'm not even thinking about future babies'.

When Kayla came out, I just wanted to hold her - I remember my husband, Anthony, and I both begging her to 'please breathe - please cry and prove them wrong'.

Coming home was so hard - I had all this milk and didn't have a child to give it to. There were baby clothes everywhere; it was a constant reminder. All I wanted for Kayla's funeral was a pink coffin ➔

and white oriental lilies – my parents took over for us and planned the rest. When the man from the funeral home came over to our house to pick up her little clothes, it seemed so wrong – your children are meant to bury *you*.

I had a lot of friends who knew about Kayla and talked about her through my pregnancy, but then, when she was born, they didn't know how to handle it, so they just kind of ignored it. I let them know about the funeral and they didn't even message back to say, 'Sorry, we can't come'. Then a couple of weeks later, they tried to speak to me as if nothing had even happened! I wished they'd sent at least a text message to let me know they were there for me.

Kayla's death was very hard on my relationship with Anthony. We grieved very differently and throughout my next pregnancy with our daughter Emalee, he didn't want to get attached just in case it happened again. I needed him to be positive and supportive. It wasn't until we were in the car leaving the hospital that he looked at me and said, 'We're taking her home, now I can breathe'. That was the moment when everything was okay for him, whereas for me that sense of relief came as soon as she was delivered and breathing.

People give you a time frame to get over it, but just because you have more children, doesn't mean that they're a replacement. We celebrate Kayla's birthday every year. Having another child after stillbirth doesn't mean the one you lost is missed or loved any less."

"my friends didn't know how to handle [my stillbirth], so they just ignored it."



DEALING WITH THEIR LOSS

How to support someone who's lost a baby.

"First of all, you need to realise that this is a life-changing moment for her," says McLeod. "When a baby dies, a lot of people think, 'I won't say anything because it's too confronting and it's too hard. I'll just wait a while and it'll all blow over'. But it won't go away and she'll remember the people who didn't contact her."

It's natural to feel a bit lost for words when faced with tragedies of this nature. However, Sydney-based clinical psychologist

Vera Auerbach (gymeaamily.org) says saying something simple and heartfelt that lets them know you're there for them is much better than saying nothing at all. "Try something like, 'I'm really sorry', and then give her a hug if that's what you want to do," says Auerbach. "You could also let her know that if she wants to talk about it at any time, you're happy to, but you also respect it if she doesn't wish to. There are practical ways

to show your support, too. "Just do the same things you would when any baby was born, like bringing over meals for dinner or helping her clean the house," suggests Auerbach.

If you'd like more information on stillbirth, contact the Stillbirth Foundation (stillbirthfoundation.org.au). Also, the Small Miracles Foundation (smallmiraclesfoundation.org.au) provides free counselling to families dealing with late-term miscarriage and stillbirth. □