

# Dear Mama,

As I write this letter to you, my sister, I shed tears thinking about my journey and how I made it through because of the words from strangers I have never even laid eyes on. I am an In vitro fertilization (IVF) mama who suffers from Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and infertility.

I found out I had PCOS at 18 years old in college from a doctor I met in the ER after falling on my knees on the way to class in excruciating pain. He looked into my eyes as he showed me a scan of my ovaries filled with cysts as big as golf balls. He never told me I would never have kids or have issues with fertility. I am 1 in 10 women who suffer from an unexplained disease which makes me vulnerable and lost. My journey to motherhood wasn't for the fainthearted. The surgeries, the NO's, the what-ifs, the pain, the MONEY, the time, the distrust, the unimaginable, the unexpected yet rewarding journey was nothing short of my strength.

I fought every day after every shot, pill, and awakening in the night from being sick from all the medicine flowing through my veins to which would ultimately help me become a mother.

The process wasn't just about me though because my husband too had infertility so here we are young, newly married, and ready to have kids but pushed into what seems like an uphill battle of becoming parents. Before we could even consider moving forward with IVF we had to check our insurance to see if it was even covered. After research, tests, and speaking with the insurance agents, we realized it was all on us to fund this process. We were looking at thousands of out-of-pocket costs and didn't even own a home yet, paid off student loans, or truly enjoy being newlyweds, but we did it and we pushed through as a team.

As we prepared for surgeries we also had to have faith and stability between us in order to tackle what we were about to encounter. I prepared my body for egg retrieval with medication and shots. I went through extreme bloating and discomfort in which after the procedure I ended up getting hyperstimulation which is fluid build-up in my abdomen. Of course, that couldn't have been the worst part; the worst part was that the fluid made its way up to my lungs. What was supposed to be 1 surgery, turned into multiple hospitalizations. I



wanted to give up. I wanted to stop the pain and suffering and tell my husband that we can't be parents, but our strength would not let me. The courage and fear pushed me to recover and persevere on this journey with my husband because we were meant to do this together at that moment, no matter the current conditions.

After all the restlessness, anxiousness, and troubling situations, the doctors retrieved 7 viable, healthy embryos to freeze. Thinking back to what I thought was my realistic approach to this process, I tell you now, Queen, do not think your fertility problems are the fault of your own.

As I sit here, I think about my 2-year-old IVF son and the son who grows in my stomach from the embryos we had frozen and praise myself! I did this! I fought through the trials, errors, and misguided thoughts. You are BAD! You are BOLD! You are POWERFUL! WE are in this together, Mama!

I advocate for IVF, infertility, and black maternal health because I hold all those titles. I demand change within the reproductive justice system because women every day who look like me and struggle with hormonal imbalances and infertility (explained or unexplained) need people who look like me to care about them. We must hold each other accountable to change the narrative about conceiving and how we become parents. Queens, we all should require quality, equitable and respectful care regarding conceiving and childbirth because it is our human right! We have the audacity, as we should, to speak up and speak out.

In maternity care units and NICUs across the U.S, mothers and babies are being disregarded, neglected and we must discontinue this narrative. Black women are the epitome of strength. We have fought through more hard times and tribulations than any other ethnicity in America. We should promote and implement new solutions to improve the black maternal child health structure for today and our children's futures.

We must embrace our power to change this ongoing story and know we cannot be diluted or ignored! You must have faith, Queen, that you will push through any obstacles that you may come across because not only are we in this together, but we are and have always been a force to be reckoned with!

Black queen, I am here for you. I believe in you. I have trust in you that you are powerful, courageous, and DOPE!

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Nyja