



The gender test

What happens if you find out baby's sex, and the news ain't good?

BY NICOLE CACCAVO KEAR

As soon as my husband and I left the doctor's office after my sonogram, I called my mother to share the results: "Guess what we're having!"

"A girl!" was her predictable answer.

Having grown up with sisters and raised three daughters, my mother sometimes forgot that males could be part of a family equation. When I told her we were expecting a boy, she was speechless. Her lack of enthusiasm wasn't surprising, but it was disappointing. "It's just..." she said, "What do you *do* with a boy?"

Great expectations

The biggest wish of all moms-to-be is to have a healthy, happy baby. But next may be to have a girl—or a boy. Yet pregnant women who have a gender preference often won't admit it, even to themselves.

"For the first half of my pregnancy, I told people the gender didn't matter at all," says Jane Machin, a mom of two in Blacksberg, VA. "When

we found out the baby was another boy, I was surprised by the twinge of disappointment I felt," she admits. "I realized that I'd subconsciously been hoping for a girl. It only lasted a few seconds, but I wasn't prepared for it at all."

A desire for one sex or the other isn't something you can wish away, says Ellen Chuse, a New York City childbirth educator and pregnancy counselor. If you're disappointed by the baby's gender, try not to let the accompanying guilt make you feel even worse. "It's important to explore it and then make a conscious effort to turn it around," she says.

Preempting gender expectations can help you be thrilled when the baby arrives, whether you choose to learn the gender or not. "If you know you have a preference, it can be helpful to find out the sex so you'll have time to adjust," Chuse suggests. "But if you don't find out, you can still prepare yourself by thinking of all the positive aspects of the gender you're less inclined toward."



49%
The percentage
of girls born
each year

Boys against girls

News of a boy might have you wondering how to relate to him. *Will he be more aggressive? How do I handle diapering and potty training?* Andrea Buchanan, editor of *It's a Boy! Women Writers on Raising Sons* and *It's a Girl! Women Writers on Raising Daughters*, read hundreds of essays from moms with such worries.

"The women expecting boys felt like they had no idea what they were getting themselves into, so it was all about a fear of the unknown," Buchanan explains. "Women expecting girls, on the other hand, knew exactly what they were getting themselves into, and that's what worried them."

It's this sameness that makes women nervous about having girls; moms if they'll become jealous of or competitive with their daughters. "I think hating your mother is just a normal part of any girl's life growing up," says Boston mother of two Robin LeWinter, who felt anxious when she found out her first baby would be a girl, thinking: "At first, I'll be her hero, and then her enemy, and then someone she has to come to grips with."

What's your story?

The biggest influence on a mom-to-be's gender fears, in fact, may be her background.

"A person's family history can't help but shape what they believe their experience with their child is going to be," says Michael G. Thompson, Ph.D., psychologist and co-author of *Speaking of Boys: Answers to the Most-Asked Questions About Raising Sons*.

If you had a tough time with your mom or were a "wild child," you're more likely to be nervous about having a daughter. But if you had a troubled relationship with your dad or brother, or have been involved with abusive men, you may be apprehensive about raising a son. "If the concern is stemming from a difficult or traumatic experience in your own childhood, then seeking professional help during pregnancy can be really useful," Chuse says.

It can be helpful to talk to friends, your partner, and other parents about your anxieties, as well. They can assist you in seeing that everyone's family relationships are different and that, despite what's worrying you, you're not doomed to repeat what happened in the past.

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The others

It's tough enough making sense of your own expectations, but someone around you—whether it's your mother, your partner, or even a close friend—probably also harbors a hope

Babies are babies

Even though it can feel like gender is an enormous part of who your baby will be, in infancy, babies with XX chromosomes aren't that different from those with XY. Contrasts in play and friendship patterns do develop later on, according to Thompson, but "for the first year of life, boys and girls are much more 'human babies' than they are gendered beings. They need love, care, attention, love, food, sleep, reliable caretaking, and more love."



for pink or blue. When this person tosses out his or her two cents, you can end up in an emotional storm. It was precisely this input that prompted Buchanan to research her books.

"People would go on and on—right in front of my 3-year-old daughter—about how great it was that I was expecting a boy this time," she says. "Everyone acted like I'd somehow dodged a bullet by not having another girl."

"There is a tremendous amount of unsolicited advice that comes to you during pregnancy," Chuse agrees. "Just understand that people tend to share negative thoughts and ideas more easily than positive ones, so these exchanges aren't really reflective of reality."

Whether you counter the feedback by grinning and bearing it or saying, "mind your own business," don't let the opinions of others get you down. After all, as soon as my mother saw my son's pointy little newborn head and swollen eyes, she surrendered to an unparalleled love, one that only grew to encompass my second child—a girl. ●

Nicole Caccavo Kear lives in New York City with her husband and their two toddlers. She penned our November 2009 story, "The name wars," about family differences over naming baby.