

Surrogacy—what you need to know about having a baby

June 20 2018, by Susan Baines



Credit: Aljona Ovtšinnikova from Pexels

Elton John and David Furnish, Kim and Kanye, and Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick, have all received help [from a surrogate](#) to have [children](#). But it's not just something for the rich and famous.

People may choose to use a surrogate for all sorts of reasons – fertility issues, preexisting [health](#) problems, issues with previous pregnancies or age-related concerns – and of course, it can seem like a no-brainer for same-sex couples or single people looking to have a family of their own.

There are two types of legal [surrogacy](#) in the UK: gestational – where the surrogate is implanted with an embryo that has been fertilised in a lab using the intended mother's or donor's egg and the intended father's or donor's sperm. And traditional surrogacy – where the surrogate's own egg is fertilised by the intended father's sperm.

What's the legal situation?

The current law means parents having a baby through surrogacy must apply for a court order to gain legal rights over the [child](#) once it has been born. This can take time and so can create issues around early life medical treatment or the consent to baby vaccinations, for example.

It can also mean that if a [surrogate mother changes her mind](#) about giving up the child, parents could face a long legal battle to try and claim the baby. This is because current rules in the UK give a woman automatic parentage over any child she gives birth to, even if the child is not biologically her own.

At the moment, the law currently only gives maternity leave and pay to the surrogate mother who will be giving birth to the baby. But the good news is that the government is looking into plans to reform surrogacy law. A three-year project will "consider the legal parentage of children born via surrogacy, and the regulation of surrogacy more widely," [according to the Law Commission](#).

How does it impact the child?

There is really very little information about the effects on a child born in this way. But there is a lot of evidence now to show that the period before birth is just as important for the health of the baby as after the birth. [The NCT 1000 Days report highlights that](#): "The antenatal period is as important as infancy is, to the outcome for a child because maternal behaviour has such a strong impact on the developing foetus and the newborns health at birth."

A [recent study](#) indicated that children born through surrogacy have more problems with their behaviour and adjustment in childhood than those born either naturally or via other reproductive technologies such as egg donation. Their lives in the womb were cited as a salient factor.

In this way, the health of the surrogate child really depends on a trusting relationship between all parties concerned. All surrogates, whether traditional or gestational, are required to complete a health screening form – and in some cases may be required to show evidence of their blood tests to the potential parents or their representatives.

What's it like for the surrogate?

Most surrogates don't get into it for the money. They do it because they love children, and they want to help people who cannot have them. Being a surrogate isn't an easy job – pregnancy puts a massive strain on the body.

The antenatal journey begins at conception and during this time, a [surrogate mother](#)'s behaviour is vitally important to the health and development of the unborn child's brain. What she eats, what she feels and what she actually experiences, are all transmitted to the growing baby.

Her body's contact with the unborn is powerful and so too is the sound of

her voice, her heartbeat and the tender touch of her hands on her belly. Being relaxed brings benefits to the baby and can help to [maintain calmness within the womb](#).

Even when the couple's egg and the sperm are implanted into the surrogate's womb, her ongoing pregnancy health can affect the immediate and [long term health](#) of the child. She needs to comply with antenatal care and be honest about her pregnancy lifestyle. Additionally, the couple need to be [honest with their medical history](#).

So how much does it cost? In the UK, the majority of surrogacy cases will be privately funded. Around £15,000 is the going rate, which tends to cover loss of earnings, medication and supplements, as well as childcare and extra food costs. On top of this, couples also have to pay for fertility clinic costs and the court fee.

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