

## **'I'm keeping all four!' What this courageous mother replied when doctors said: Sacrifice two of your quads to save the others**

- **The boys were conceived naturally at odds of 750,000 to one**
- **They are now four happy and healthy one-year-olds**

By Luke Salkeld

Pregnant with quadruplets, Emma Robbins was told again and again that she should terminate two of her babies to give the others a better chance of survival.

Again and again, she told doctors she had no intention of sacrificing any of her boys, who were conceived naturally at odds of 750,000 to one.

Now she has all the proof she needed that her instinct was right: four happy, healthy and utterly adorable one-year-olds.

The healthy quadruplets from left to right, Sammy, Zachary, Joshua and Reuben Robbins at home. Mother Emma Robbins was advised to consider terminating two to save the other two during her pregnancy

Mrs Robbins told the consultant that she was keeping all four babies after an overwhelming sense of love rushed through her

Zachary, Joshua, Reuben and Sam had their first birthday party yesterday.

The brothers are even more remarkable because they were born on February 29 last year – at odds of 3.5million to one – so will celebrate their true birthday only once every four years. Mrs Robbins, 31, and her husband Martin, 39, already had a son, three-year-old Luke, when they tried for what they thought would be their second child.

Mrs Robbins said: 'Never in a million years did we think we'd have four babies at once. I'd be lying if I said it was easy, but we're so glad we never gave up on our babies.'

She added: 'At ten weeks I was a lot larger than I'd been with Luke and I was suffering from horrendous morning sickness. I was worried that something might be wrong.'

'The sonographer looked at both of us wide-eyed, turned the screen to us, and then said she could see three amniotic sacs and not just two babies but four. And not just quads but identical twins as well.' Mrs Robbins said her husband, a sign-maker, 'looked numb and just laughed'. The next time they visited St Michael's Hospital in Bristol, the consultant congratulated them – but then warned the couple they should consider terminating some or all of the babies.

Multiple pregnancies, where a woman becomes pregnant with two or more embryos, can cause complications including miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, cerebral palsy and death.

'He [the consultant] told us the risks were so high it would put me in danger and the babies too,' she said. 'He said we had three options. We could terminate the pregnancy, reduce the pregnancy by terminating some of the embryos, or carry on. Instinctively I clutched my bump. An overwhelming sense of love rushed through me and I told him that we were keeping all four of them.'

Happy family: Left to right, mother Emma Robbins with her sons Reuben, Joshua, Zachary and Sammy and husband Martin at home in Bristol

The former project manager, who lives in Bristol, said the same advice was given after her 12-week scan.

She said: 'I'd just been scanned and had been told everything looked fine but now he was pointing out the risks again and asking me to consider aborting the twins for the sake of the other two. I was beginning to feel pressured and it didn't feel fair. We'd already made our decision.'

'All our babies were doing well. We'd seen their tiny outlines on the screen and we'd already begun to think of them individually.'

Once again, at 16 weeks into the pregnancy, the couple were told to consider aborting the twins. Mrs Robbins said: 'By now I felt under immense pressure and I was getting angry.'

With his newborn son: Martin Robbins with Zachary, one of the identical twins out of the quadruplets very unusually born on 29 February 2012

Mummy's little miracles: The quadruplets were conceived naturally at odds of 750, 000 to one

'Each time I went to the hospital it was all about the risks and asking me to consider aborting the twins to save the other two babies. But I knew that each time I looked at my surviving babies I'd also be thinking about the ones I'd lost. The thought of it broke my heart.'

At Mrs Robbins's 18-week scan the consultant warned her again, saying 20 weeks would be the last time a termination or selective reduction would be possible.

She said: 'By now we'd found out that all our babies were boys and as soon as he'd finished I told him it wasn't an option and that was final.'

'We didn't know how we'd manage financially and practically but I felt it must have happened for a reason. I decided I'd do everything in my power to give birth to four healthy babies.' On February 29 last year, two months before her due date, Mrs Robbins went into labour.

Reuben was the first to be delivered by caesarean section, weighing 2lb 14oz, followed by Zachary, 2lb 8oz, and his twin Joshua, 3lb 1oz, and finally Sam, 2lb 13oz.

After two months in hospital, the boys, whom Mrs Robbins calls her 'little miracle Peter Pans' were strong enough to be taken home – where they soon made their presence felt.

She said: 'Each night the babies would wake up one after the other and start screaming, which would wake Luke up, too.'

'We had to turn our lounge into the nursery and would take in turns to sleep down there. With four breastfeeds to coordinate every four hours, day and night, as well as bottles, 30 nappy changes and endless baths, life was exhausting.'

And as the boys get bigger, so do the challenges. Mrs Robbins said: 'When they're all in the buggy together it weighs ten stone. Pushing it is a serious workout.'

## **WHY ARE MULTIPLE PREGNANCIES SO RISKY?**

Multiple pregnancies, where a woman becomes pregnant with two or more embryos, can cause complications including miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, cerebral palsy and death. Fourteen out of 1,000 pregnancies will be multiple pregnancies, with the average term being 36 weeks for twins, 32 weeks for triplets and 30 weeks for quadruplets

Although multiple pregnancy raises the risk of a woman dying during pregnancy or childbirth, harm to the babies is far more likely.

The greater the number of babies in the womb, the smaller they will be and low birth weight brings a whole range of problems.

A frequent problem is that the lungs will not be fully developed, causing respiratory problems.

Also, because identical twins can share an amniotic sac and a placenta, they are at risk of becoming tangled in each other's umbilical cords and suffer twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome - a rare placental disease that results in one twin getting less blood (nutrition) than the other.

## **HOW RARE ARE MULTIPLE SETS OF IDENTICAL TWINS?**

While extremely rare, delivering two sets of identical twins isn't unheard of. The odds of having non-identical twins are one in 80; with identical twins this rises to one in every 240 cases.

With identical twins, a single egg splits just before it implants in the uterus, Basky Thilaganathan, a spokesperson for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists told MailOnline. He said: 'In the case of two sets of identical twins, two eggs were fertilised by the sperm and then BOTH decided to split before they were implanted, the odds of which are roughly around one in 70 million.'