



Pregnancy
Sickness
Support



HG Truths with Dana Hassan

My name is Dana Hassan, originally from Spain now living in London and working as a doctor in Northwick Park Hospital currently on maternity leave.

Why is raising awareness about HG important to you?

It is extremely important to raise awareness about this disease so that more people are able to understand future pregnant women who might be suffering with HG in their families, work, group of friends etc. So that pregnant women know that they are not alone and are able to get the appropriate treatment from the medical team and support from family and friends.

Tell us how your HG experience started

It started when I was 4 weeks pregnant. I felt extremely tired and sick. I thought it was early pregnancy symptoms and that it will pass the day after. That day I went with my husband to Bath to a spa for the weekend and felt extremely sick in the car on the way to Bath. I was extremely fit and active person prior to pregnancy and I even brought weights to exercise in the spa, obviously they stayed in the car. I could never imagine that what it was supposed to be a romantic holiday with my husband it was going to end up in me being bed bound, ordering carbs for room service, only being able to eat plain foods and extremely nauseated about anything. I was very surprised and shocked by how I felt but at the same time I was happy as I was pregnant and thought it was a one-day thing. I really thought it was normal symptoms and that it will pass.

This continued for the 9 months of my pregnancy. I managed to continue to work, but it destroyed me. 3 days of work meant 4 days of being bedbound and vomiting throughout the day.

I would burst into tears to my husband and to my mum almost every day saying how miserable I was during the first trimester.

What was the response from your healthcare providers?

First time I went to GP at 4 weeks, she reassured me that it was completely normal and that it will pass soon. As this was ongoing and as a doctor I knew something was not right but I didn't want to accept that I had HG as it is extremely rare and often very criticised in the medical environment.

I booked an appointment with a different GP in the same practice as the first one was on holidays at about 7-8 weeks. He was amazing, gave me medication straight away and he sent me a link to this organisation as I didn't know about it. He said that I cannot keep going like that and he also gave me a sick letter to work to remove me from medical on calls and long hours. Since this appointment, I would book a phone appointment with him once a week to manage my medications. I tried almost all of the antiemetics and only when I was 20 weeks I would say I could control the nausea with them. Because of him and his weekly support I managed to avoid to be admitted in hospital. The name of the GP is Dr. Afshin Kahen at Ravenscroft medical centre in Golders Green London. My midwife only felt pity for me, she was really nice but not useful at all and to be honest I didn't mind as my GP was amazing.

How did it impact your day-to-day life?

My husband was extremely supportive but I became the centre of our relationship and he had to do literally everything for me. From laundry to cooking to cleaning etc. It made me realised even more how amazing is the man I married. Because I was so sick, we only managed to be intimate on very few occasions. In the mornings I would be sick and in the night I would be nauseous and destroyed. He completely understood and never said a word but I felt very bad and guilty because of this. I got pregnant on our wedding night so basically our first year of marriage I have been sick and this made me very sad.

It did affect my job. As I said I am a doctor and I am supposed to do weekends, long days and on call days including nights. I was always a very active doctor, always on top of everything and willing to help to anyone. HG made me extremely exhausted. It was very early in pregnancy so I didn't want to tell my work that I was pregnant as I started working in a new hospital and also because I haven't even told my family or friends. I had to tell my supervisor that I was pregnant and that I had severe sickness. His answer was "yes, being pregnancy is tricky". He wasn't helpful at all. He should have directed me to occupational therapy to do a risk assessment but he didn't and I was clueless on what to do.

One Friday that I was supposed to cover the weekend, I was sick during my shift and need to be sitting down all the time. I spoke with the consultant on call and said that I shouldn't be working so he sent me home and spoke with the manager to organise a risk assessment. Thanks to this I stopped doing on calls, nights and I was only doing short days.

As a doctor I felt very guilty for not being there, especially because it was in between the first and second wave of coronavirus and he had many patients.

For me, having a shower was a nightmare. I would get very dizzy and had to have a shower when my husband was around just in case. Also brushing my teeth would make me vomit. I had to force myself to continue with my basic needs. In terms of cooking, cleaning etc my husband had to do everything for me. I was too tired and needed all my energy for the days I went to work.

What was the hardest part?

The hardest part was not being able to enjoy being pregnant. Also I had a lot of expectations on how I was going to be. I wanted to have a clean and healthy pregnancy. Eating only healthy food and exercising everyday. It was very hard to accept that I was not able to exercise for 9 months and that eating vegetables and fish would make me vomit. Also, how some of my friends and family didnt understand how difficult it was for me and kept suggesting to eat ginger.

What do you wish people knew about HG?

I wish that they understand that this exist and how difficult is for pregnant women. Also I wish they know how to support and talk to someone with HG.

What did recovery look like for you?

-how long did you have symptoms for, did you/do you still struggle post pregnancy

I had symptoms for 9 months, up until the day of my C section but they improved at the beginning of the third trimester.

-did you have relief from medication

I tried several types of antiemetics, and I found cyclizine combined to ondansetron and omeprazole the most effective for me. Medication stop sickness but not nausea or tiredness. For me tiredness and exhaustion was the most difficult to deal and there is no medication for it. I only managed to have some nausea free periods by my third trimester.

What is your message for anyone else suffering?

For anyone else suffering I would say dont be afraid to ask for help. It is very important to have support and this organisation offers an amazing team of volunteers who have been going through a similar experience. All the feelings of wanting the pregnancy to end and sadness are normal but it is very important to talk about them with close family that you trust and with your medical team. The sooner you ask for help the better. Noone should go through this alone and without support. Not all doctors and midwives are trained in HG but there are definitely some who are awesome.