

My story – Dee Hawke.

I found out I was pregnant when I'd just turned 20. It wasn't a happy occasion, I'd gone to a family planning clinic due to severe pains around my side that had been happening for a few days. I sat down and they asked if I was pregnant, "no way" I said. I had to do a pregnancy test anyway but laughed it off. The lady walked into the room with the test and said " your pregnant- no doubt about it".

With that I was sent to hospital with a suspected ectopic pregnancy. It took weeks to get my head around it. After 2 weeks of back and forth hospital appointments they confirmed my baby was in the right place and all was well.

Just as I was starting to feel ok about being pregnant I started feeling sick, very sick. Not just a bit of nausea this was severe sickness.

I went to my doctors and they told me it was morning sickness and told me to try ginger and acupressure bands.

After 5 days of not eating or drinking and with my sickness getting worse I went back and told him that ginger was ridiculous and the bands were even worse. He prescribed me an anti-sickness medication called cyclizine. I left feeling like they had listened and I was on my way to never being sick again.

How wrong I was.

At 6 weeks pregnant I was so ill I could hardly move. The cyclizine didn't work for me. I couldn't eat at all and I only managed a few sips of water a day but that would usually come straight back up. I was so weak and loosing so much weight. I suffered incredible migraines, dizziness, and constant nausea and I would lay on the bathroom floor wishing my life away.

I made it to 9 weeks, I don't know how. I saw my midwife who told me again "it's just morning sickness, it'll be gone by the 12th week."

That didn't happen.

I'd never heard of Hyperemesis before but I read hundreds of forums and instantly knew it was what I had.

There were days I thought I would die, it sounds extreme but I was being sick so many times a day I burst the capillaries in my face, and was vomiting blood.

I had no help during my first pregnancy, it didn't seem to be very important to doctors or midwives back then (2005). I'm lucky my family were so supportive.

By 28 weeks my sickness had nearly gone, I was still sick but it wasn't constant. I gave birth to a healthy baby girl at 40weeks+10days.

I went on to have another HG pregnancy which was made worse by having another little person to care for. I had slightly more help but after trying every anti sickness medication possible I needed to be hospitalised and rehydrated with IV fluids. Again by 27 weeks I was starting to feel more human. I gave birth to my son in 2008.

I found out I was pregnant with my third baby in 2012 and I'd researched Hyperemesis a lot, it stated again at 6 weeks and this time I was ready (ish). I'd read on some American forums about a drug called ondansetron that could help and this time I walked into my doctors and demanded treatment. I was told it's worth a try but it's expensive, very expensive.

I didn't care, I was already in a bad way I just wanted to not be sick and be able to eat and drink normally. A few days later I was hospitalised and put on IV fluids again. This time I was really looked after, they corrected my medication and made sure I could come straight back in if I needed fluids.

I managed well at home with ondansetron. With this medication I could do everything again. There were occasions where I was sick but it was nothing compared to before. I took ondansetron throughout the entire pregnancy and gave birth to my beautiful healthy son in 2013.

I'm now a Volunteer Peer Supporter for Pregnancy Sickness Support and I support women going through the same ordeal. I think it's great to have someone to talk to who's been through the same experience. Hyperemesis is not just sickness, it's an incredibly debilitating, isolating and exhausting illness and a huge amount of support is needed to get through it.

I love being a volunteer I find it so rewarding that I can be of help and offer information and support to someone who really needs it. Unless you've suffered with Hyperemesis it's very hard to understand exactly how that person feels.

Pregnancy Sickness Support is holding its bi-annual conference for sufferers and volunteers on Saturday 14th May in Bristol in the lead up to HG Awareness Day on 15th May. This is an opportunity for existing volunteers to develop their knowledge and training on the condition and how best they can support sufferers. New volunteers can attend to find out about the charity and how they can get involved and current sufferers can find out more about treatments and support available as well as how they can support the charity in the future.

Pregnancy Sickness Support (PSS) is a UK charity for pregnancy sickness and hyperemesis gravidarum (HG). In addition to providing information and support for pregnant women and their carers, the charity also raises awareness among the public and healthcare professionals (HCPs) through impactful media campaigns to reduce the stigma about this misunderstood condition. Furthering research is a key aim of the charity and forms the basis for our HCP education programmes, service development support and annual conferences.

If you are suffering and in need of information and support please call the helpline on 024 7638 2020

More information about the charity can be found at www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk