

Hyperemesis Gravidarum and me

I was going to wait until after the birth of my baby to write about my experience of Hyperemesis Gravidarum but I know as soon as this is over I will forget about how bad it actually is and how crappy I feel at the moment.

I'd been broody for over two years, every time I saw a cute little chubby cheeked baby my ovaries would scream at me. Finally it was the right time for me and the hubs to start a family. Very quickly we got the news we were waiting for, I was pregnant! Little did I know what I was about to encounter. I expected some changes to occur of course, putting on weight, getting more tired, bigger boobs (the best part!). All of these are just part and parcel of being pregnant. Your body changes so much, it's amazing what goes on really. I did not however expect to be vomiting for 7 or so months leaving my body feeling weak and bruised all over, my throat burnt from the acid, my stomach sore from the retching and at some points my life dangling by a thread. It has been a scary time not only for me but for my family too.

I started feeling off when I was 5 weeks pregnant, this prompted me to take a pregnancy test. I knew it was going to be positive, I just felt different. My tummy was bloated, my boobs were bigger, I just knew.

At 6 weeks we went on holiday to Milan. It was unbelievably hot and I felt queasy all the time but just put this down to the heat. On the way home the journey was hellish, train, bus, plane, coach, bus. The journey was so long! On the last part of the journey I was sat in front of a guy who had THE worst smelling breath ever, not even exaggerating. I have never smelt anything so bad and trust me I've smelt a lot of bad things through the work I do. Every single time this guy breathed I felt sick, to make matters worse he kept coughing, releasing his pungent fumes into the air. EEEEEEW. It was so bad and it made me really angry that someone could smell so bad. I dread to think what he had been eating!

We finally got home and that is when it all began. For the next two weeks I was sick all the time. It's just morning sickness I thought, I'd heard it was common and would disappear sometime at the end of the first trimester. Every time I was sick I would think of the guy with the bad breath, it was horrid. I felt so ill, this wasn't right surely? 'It's just morning sickness' everyone said. They looked at me like I was being a wimp. 'We've all been through it' blah blah blah. I felt like I was dying and little did I realise I actually was. I was in a lot of pain, my skin and lips were dry, I felt so weak. I couldn't concentrate on anything at work, I looked at the writing on my computer screen over and over again, and goodness knows what I must have looked like. I felt awful. I'd told a few people at work I was pregnant. I told my friend I didn't know if anyone else had guessed by how ill I was, my friend told me 'no offence but you look like shit' ha-ha!

People must have known something was different about me. I lost nearly a stone in two weeks because I couldn't keep any food or drink down. Normally I'd kill for this kind of weight loss but I felt so rough. I'd take a few sips of water and even that would come back up. I was miserable. According to everyone I spoke to, even my doctor, this was perfectly normal. I cried at home, I cried at my desk in work. I felt like such a fool, a wimp who couldn't deal with a bit of morning sickness. I was told 'pregnancy isn't an illness' but I'd never felt so ill in my entire life.

Every day was the same, I'd go to work, be sick all day, even when my stomach was empty, go home, get straight in bed and do it all again the next day. My husband cooked my tea and woke me up to eat every night. I ate, desperately hoping to keep something down, nothing did. I felt like a failure. It

was such a contrast to how I used to be. I used to go to the gym 4 times a week, meet up with my friends, cook dinner, fit as much into life as I could. I was always busy. Now I could barely function.

After a particularly bad week the weekend arrived and I couldn't wait to rest and hopefully feel a bit better. I lay on the sofa trying to sleep. I was in constant pain. My mum and dad came round to see how I was. I remember them being there, talking to me but I didn't know what they were saying and I couldn't respond. Actually writing this now I'm in tears, I didn't realise how bad I was. I was dying. My mum took me to the hospital. The doctor did some tests and said 'you need to go to hospital to be treated right away'. I burst into tears, I was scared but also relieved that someone believed that I was as ill as I'd been feeling.

I remember the nurses looking at each other worriedly as they took my temperature which was sky high and I told them I felt cold. I was put on a drip and given fluids and anti-sickness medication. It felt bloody brilliant! No pain! I don't even remember my husband leaving the hospital that night, I was totally out of it. The next few days in hospital I ate and ate for the first time in weeks without being in pain, without feeling the waves of nausea creeping over me. I felt normal again. The doctors and nurses told me then that I have a condition called Hyperemesis Gravidarum, excess vomiting, thought to be caused by the increase in hormones in the body during pregnancy which only affects 1-2% of pregnant women. I felt better mentally and physically knowing that I wasn't just being a wimp and there actually was something wrong. My kidneys had been failing, that's why I was in so much pain. I had been going in and out of consciousness that's why I hadn't been responding to my husband or parents. Quite scary now I look back. This condition is serious and if left untreated can cause a woman to go into a coma and even die. I feel lucky to be alive.

I was 8 weeks pregnant and looked at the little 2cm jelly bean shaped form busily spinning round on the monitor during my scan. How could something so small cause my body so much harm? I was in hospital for three days. They put me on anti-sickness medication which I continue to take now at 33 weeks. I've tried all sorts of different medication, none have really worked for me. The main tablet I've been prescribed works to a certain extent. If I don't take it I'm far worse than when I do take it. When it's working I'm still sick 2/3 times a day most days. It's not just a case of being sick, which itself is bad enough. No matter how many times you've done it before being sick does not get any easier. Hyperemesis takes all of your energy and robs you of the enjoyment of being pregnant. Some days I do nothing but puke and sleep. On my 'good' days I like to make the most of my energy and see friends, try and make myself feel a bit more normal again.

One of the most frustrating things I've found throughout all of this is that people just don't understand how I feel, especially if they only see me when I'm having a 'good' day. Many a time I have not showered for 3/4 days, my only interaction being with the toilet and my bed but when I have midwife/Dr appointments I shower, get dressed and slap on some make up because I just can't stand looking scruffy. This has been my downfall because sometimes they couldn't see how rubbish I was feeling. I was so tempted a few times just to roll up un-showered in my pyjamas, tears and vomit strewn across my face. Take a selfie perhaps on one of the many occasions my head has been buried in that porcelain bowl and show it to them so they could see what I really felt like. People don't get it.

The amount of times I've explained to someone what I'm going through and they've said 'try ginger biscuits'. If medication isn't working I doubt a pack of ginger nuts is gonna work. It's surprisingly a little bit beyond the magic healing power of biscuits. Grrrr I'd imagine stuffing a pack of ginger biscuits into their mouth just to shut them up whilst smiling sweetly and biting my tongue. Everyone has an opinion and what I've found is that you can't really understand something until you've been

through it. I wondered how many times I've given an opinion on something I had no idea about and caused annoyance to someone else.

The past 7 or so months have been hell. Not only physically but mentally too. I still have a little way to go and I'm counting down the days till I get to hold my baby boy and feel human once more. When I feel him kicking and moving around I know it has all been worth it. This experience will have made me a stronger person, maybe not physically (my kidneys hate me!) but definitely mentally. Throughout this whole experience I have tried to be positive. After all I know there are people out there suffering things far worse than me. I still have my life and for that I am so grateful. I have learnt that you have to stay positive, make the most of what you have and never take anything for granted in this life. It's also made me appreciate the family and friends that surround me. I would not be here without them.

Thanks for reading. I hope that this explains a little bit about Hyperemesis Gravidarum to those that didn't know about it and raises some awareness. I can only tell you about my own experience of this horrible condition. If you are suffering remember it will get better, you will be ok and it will not last forever. Just keep going!!