

Morning sickness.. 'it's normal'

I always dreamt of my first pregnancy and how amazing it was going to be. Always so interested and fascinated with the miracle of new life! One of the reasons I became a midwife!!

Being a midwife I felt I was well aware of pregnancy symptoms and didn't expect to feel completely wonderful but I was not prepared for what was in store for me...

Happily married in December 2016 we quickly fell pregnant in the April 2017 and I was so shocked when the 2 lines appeared.. I had no symptoms! In fact my only symptom was feeling happy and didn't have my usual premenstrual hormonal melt down a few days before my period!

For the next few weeks I felt like I was walking on a cloud, no symptoms, no tiredness, and no sickness! This was great!

Then week 6 hit, a few little dizzy and tired moments, it was exciting as now I felt like it was real! At 6+4 I was going to my grandad's funeral and I made my husband pull over and get me plastic bags, polos and water. I felt really sick!

For the next few weeks I was slightly alarmed that the nausea was all day and I didn't even get an hour off, wasn't this meant to be morning sickness?! Or just in the evening? Why literally all day?

Anyway it's normal isn't it I told myself.... people keep saying it is.. Even my job as a midwife it was normalised... and I have got to get on with it haven't I? I felt terrible 24/7 but carried on working and just getting through the days ... it became a cycle of working and come home and crashing on the couch trying to sleep - the only escape from the nausea. I always planned on eating super healthy in pregnancy and exercising ... My diet now consisted of sandwiches, jacket potatoes and Ribena and I became a lot more inactive. In fact to make a sandwich I had to pull up the dining room chair to the worktop because I didn't have enough energy to stand for long.

8 weeks hit and so did the vomiting, all day nausea getting more intense. I will be ok by 12 weeks I told myself ...I just knew it! Had to take a few days off from work as was vomiting too much but I went to the GPs and got anti sickness tablets. The GP advised to be off for a few weeks but I said no because I wanted to 'be strong' as I felt everyone normalised the sickness ... I didn't want to seem weak. I'll just take the tablets and will power on I told myself, even if it meant I was been sick into a bag whilst driving to visits and been sick in between seeing women at clinic.

The tablets didn't really work. It was the constant nausea which took it out of me, vomiting was a bit more inconsistent, some days lots other days just a few times. My life cycle was work and sleep and on my days off couch ridden. I was also very dizzy and blacked out a lot when I stood up.

Well 12 weeks hit, no sign of it letting up... ok well it did for my mum I told myself ... so maybe soon for me! I tried to keep positive... 13, 14 weeks passed and no better. Ok maybe I'm one of those unlucky women who is sick till 16 weeks! I hardly see anyone as a community midwife who is still sick at the 16 week appointment. Surly I can make it till then, if not I'll lose the plot I thought to myself!

Ok 15 weeks and the 'powering through' took its toll. I got worse. Vomiting increased, couldn't move without being sick. I looked terrible, I blacked out most times when I stood up. I was still vomiting in bags between women at clinic and between visits. I had a bag on my knee - vomiting into it whilst I was driving. I ended up off sick. Of course I thought I won't be long, I'll be ok in a week I told myself because I will be 16 weeks!

No, I got worse. Then slightly better then at 17 weeks hit me hard and I couldn't even keep fluids down. By 20 weeks the constant nausea had finally lifted. For the rest of my pregnancy it was on and off but I could deal with it better as it wasn't constant.

I cannot tell you how horrific it all was. I couldn't have a shower as I was too faint, I'd black out if I stood up and have to hold the wall for 10 seconds. I had baths but cold baths because it was too hot. I didn't want move even slightly because the nausea would intensify and I would be sick. I am usually a chatty person but speaking made me feel sick so I stopped talking. I would just sit on the couch and stare. I had no appetite but I had to eat to control the nausea but then after eating it actually it made it worse and then I was sick. I had to live off potatoes and bread because they were the nicest thing to be sick. I couldn't stand the smell of anyone, including my husband. Didn't want anyone in my personal space. I was sick all over myself, the carpet, dressing gown, I didn't care. I would carry my sick bin around with me like it was my best friend. There were times I choked on sick and feel like I couldn't breathe. I liked to lay on the cool bathroom floor for relief. I felt honestly like each day I was being slowly tortured with no let up. All this was happening in the height of summer - I hated the sun, I hated warmth and the light, It made me feel worse. I craved darkness, rain and coolness. The only time I felt relief was when I was asleep and I looked forward to bedtime every day because in my dreams I didn't feel the torture of the nausea.

Of course I was excited for the baby... but to be honest i didn't feel pregnant, I felt ill. I couldn't wait for it to be over. It had a massive effect on my mental health. I felt so numb, down, depressed, and hopeless. In fact I remember crying in desperation to my midwife and scoring a really high score on the depression questions and then getting referred to mental health for support. I had never even had symptoms of depression before but this is what HG did to me. I grieved the pregnancy I always dreamt of. I felt so guilty for been so useless, for being a rubbish wife, for not been able to work. I didn't even want to be awake. I was frustrated and felt like I wanted to rip my oesophagus out for the nausea to go away. I was so desperate for relief I searched the internet for any ideas, other people's stories. I was so desperate for relief I even had 'dark' thoughts such as wishing for a miscarriage or termination just for the relief - although I didn't want that to happen I just wanted the relief - I couldn't help these thoughts... they just popped into my head and then I felt guilty. I even thought I would rather be dead then endure another day of this. I had no plans to act upon these thoughts but they made me feel so guilty, made me feel such a bad, bad person. This baby was all I ever wanted! But I was dealing with desperation. I couldn't help the way I was thinking.

I have a new found respect for women who suffer with HG and severe all day sickness. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. It has opened my eyes to how horrific and relentless it can be. I was on four different medications, I never got admitted though I should have been and I lost over a stone in weight. **The culture is that sickness is normal so many people don't understand - including health professionals such as midwives and doctors.... and I know because I am one of them.**

My daughter is 4 months now and I haven't been sick since she was born. I can enjoy her and enjoy summer... as the last one was so horrific. I wanted more children but I am not sure I could go through that again... I am blessed with my daughter and she was worth every moment. I couldn't have got through it without the support from friends/family and of course Pregnancy Sickness Support ... it took me 5 days to pluck up courage to ring them because I was scared I would be fobbed off like a lot of people did when I was so sick in pregnancy ...I'm so glad I did because PSS listened, took me seriously, gave me up to date /evidence based advice and set me up with a peer supporter. I will always be grateful to PSS. When I go back to work as a community midwife my aim

will be to raise awareness of HG and help other professionals understand more about it to enable women to get the best care and support.

Thank you PSS - I will be forever grateful. What an amazing charity you are xxx