

Marie



We'd said we would have two children. We bought a big family house for a family of 4. I'd liked to have had a boy and a girl. Oscar is 5 months old now. He's an only child and always will be. I was never prepared for that journey!

A week after returning from my amazing honeymoon in Thailand, I thought I was still suffering with jet lag. Still totally shattered and still feeling really sick. I'd had jet lag before but this felt totally different, a feeling I'd never felt before.

New Year's Eve I had the shock of my life, two little red lines on that stick! I couldn't believe it, I was pregnant with our first child less than a month after our wedding. I'd like to say I was over the moon but it was a mix of emotions. We'd planned to try and get pregnant in 2016 so I was very happy it happened with such little effort and considered myself blessed in that respect. However, I felt horrific.

I'd done the test on the Thursday, on the following Tuesday late morning, I was sick for the first time. I emailed Dav my husband and almost felt proud that it was confirmed. I now had morning sickness! I had to tell my boss my news as I spent so much time in the toilets and I felt so awful. By the end of that week I'd convinced people at work I had food poisoning from a curry I'd eaten to save myself telling the truth. I was sick 7 times in work on the Friday. I arranged my first midwife appointment for the Sunday so was hoping she would be able to help me with this feeling. Everything I put in my mouth came back up...EVERYTHING!

My midwife came to see me and advised I was being sick a lot more than the usual and I needed to ensure I tried to stay hydrated. I was having awful stomach cramps too so she advised I called for an out of hours doctor just to get checked over. That night I went to our local hospital where the doctor prodded and poked me, tested my urine and asked me all sorts of questions.

He told me I had Hyperemesis Gravidarum. I had absolutely no idea what he said to me, he had to write it down. I'd never heard of this but he assured me it wouldn't last longer than 12 weeks. As we I hated myself by now. I hated pregnancy. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't thought of terminating at times. Mainly while I was sat on my bathroom floor, too terrified to move because I knew I'd be sick again if I did.

Sometimes I'd sit there for 30/40 minutes, what was the point in moving I'd think? I succumbed to the awful reality of having a sick bucket at the side of my bed

didn't know how far along I was and due to the sickness and cramps, he referred me to the early pregnancy assessment unit for a scan and to be checked by a consultant. I was given my first of many anti sickness medication to try, which made no difference as I couldn't keep anything down.

On the following Wednesday I was in the Heath hospital in Cardiff for my first scan. Drink plenty of water they said, that didn't go down well!

It was at this time I realised I was ill, very ill. They tested my urine as they always do and the words that came out of that consultant's mouth are words I'll never forget - your body isn't reacting well to pregnancy. She told me my body was showing signs of starvation and malnutrition. I was mortified and already felt like I was failing at growing my unborn baby. I was then told I needed to be admitted for fluids to rehydrate me. I cried, I'd found out I was pregnant less than two weeks ago and already it was like I wasn't doing it properly and needed help. I'm a woman and my job at this moment in time was just to grow my baby and I couldn't do it without the use of medical help. The scan showed I was 6 weeks pregnant. I can't say that seeing the little poached egg on the screen helped. That's exactly what it looked like, it wasn't a baby looking just yet and there was no heartbeat that I could see. I was gutted that I didn't get the sudden rush of love and affection for the seed sized baby that was making me feel so ill.

I was discharged from hospital with different anti sickness medication which would hopefully allow me to eat and keep fluids down. They didn't.

The following week Dav took me to my GP to ask for different medication as I was back to square one and was unable to keep anything down again. Another urine test showed I was again severely dehydrated and needed to go back to hospital. This was two days before my birthday.

The midwives were fantastic, the consultants just kept insisting that I tried to eat small amounts. At times it felt like I was talking to a brick wall. If one more person suggested I tried to eat dry crackers or ginger biscuits I was going to scream - this lasted for my entire pregnancy, I wanted to have a badge made to say DO NOT SUGGEST GINGER!!

Dav had booked for us to go to Oxford for my birthday. I woke up in the Heath hospital attached to an IV machine on my birthday so sadly we didn't make Oxford. I was discharged again with different anti sickness medication and now living in hope this would ease up soon. This isn't how I saw myself doing pregnancy. I was supposed to be going to pregnancy classes and enjoying eating my body weight in anything my body craved. Instead I couldn't climb the stairs without vomiting, I couldn't go in the kitchen without vomiting, I couldn't walk down the street without vomiting. I became a prisoner in my own home.

Over the coming weeks the sickness was being controlled by the anti sickness meds I was now on and by the fact I stopped eating. I didn't eat because I hated being sick. Over the weeks and months I tried different foods to see if I could tolerate anything. Most of it came back up. I found I could keep plain pasta down and red grapes, that was it, I lived on plain pasta and red grapes for months. I became so depressed and isolated. Dav had to work, I was now on long term sick from work and I felt like I was losing my mind. I began to resent being pregnant. I was so active and always loved being outdoors, and now I spent days and days in bed. Not showering or brushing my teeth because I couldn't cope with the consequences. I was referred to the perinatal mental health team for counselling and my GP almost begged me to consider antidepressants as I was getting lower and lower. I started seeing my counsellor when I was 16 weeks pregnant and to be honest it was just nice to have someone to talk to. She eventually convinced me at 19 weeks pregnant to start a course of antidepressants to try and minimise the chances of post natal depression when the baby arrived.

I hated myself by now. I hated pregnancy. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't thought of terminating at times. Mainly while I was sat on my bathroom floor, too terrified to move because I knew I'd be sick again if I did. Dav would sit with me holding my hair, rubbing my back and wiping away endless tears. He even told me he would understand if I couldn't continue with the pregnancy.

This baby was wanted but at times I can honestly say that if I'd miscarried, would I be that upset, Or would there be a slight feeling of relief that I could function again? I hated that I felt like this. I hate myself now that I felt like this when I look at my adorable gorgeous little boy.

I took the first antidepressant on the Tuesday morning after visiting my GP. By 3pm that day I was back to being violently sick and couldn't keep anything down again. I spent the next 2 days in my bedroom in the dark as the light and sound of anything was unbearable. Thursday afternoon I was back in the Heath hospital attached to yet another machine. This admission was the worst. A consultant actually asked me why I was still this bad? It's supposed to get better by 12/14 weeks she said. I was now 20 weeks, lost a lot of weight, still unable to eat and living on plain pasta and grapes which nobody approved of. I felt like a goldfish in a goldfish bowl. So many doctors came to see me, all with different ideas on how to make this better. One wanted to give me steroids and one wanted to put a tube down my throat and feed me that way.

Then came the bigger blow to my heart I'd taken so far. A junior doctor, who insisted I just try to eat, told me that termination might have to be an option. For the first time I felt fire in my belly and the need to protect my baby. I insisted termination wasn't an option. She didn't stop there, she told me I might not have a choice if I carried on the way I was going. I sobbed uncontrollably and begged this doctor to help me and this is what I was given.

There was some light at the end of this awful time. I saw a senior consultant on the 3rd day I was in hospital. He came up with a suggestion of mixing medication which would hopefully all work together and control the sickness and nausea.

I was discharged from hospital with a pharmacy. Pills for everything along with gross vitamin drinks to give me the energy and calories I wasn't getting from food.

Things improved slightly after this. I wasn't sick as often and even though I still felt awfully sick all the time, I slowly started to be able to tolerate more. A week later we discovered we were having a boy. I had another complication also meaning there was a risk to the baby so was told I'd be induced at 38 weeks, music to my ears as I could finally see an end date to this nightmare I was living.

I was in one hospital weekly for blood tests and another fortnightly for scans and consultant appointments. I was being monitored to within an inch of my life. Leading up to my due date, I worried as I didn't bond with my bump. I wasn't excited about meeting my baby, I couldn't wait for him to arrive but more so because I needed this to end. We went shopping for prams and furniture and I hated that I wasn't like all the other expecting mums around me who were all blooming. I hated seeing pregnant women out having lunch with their partners and friends just enjoying the lead up to their exciting new life. I so desperately wanted to be like those mums.

I had this expectation in my head that once he arrived and the sickness went, I'd be perfectly fine again and could finally enjoy motherhood.

Oscar was born via emergency c-section at 38+3 weeks following 3 failed induction attempts, of course the labour wasn't to go smoothly either!

I felt three things when I heard him cry and saw him for the very first time: 1) I did it, he's here and fine 2) YES I'm going to feel normal again 3) GUILT. Guilt that I'd been given this gorgeous baby boy when for the whole time carrying him, I hated being pregnant. I didn't feel worthy of this amazing gift of life.

These feelings of guilt didn't go away, they got much much worse. I had terrible anxiety, PTSD and postnatal depression. My medication was doubled and I continued with my counselling. The older Oscar got the worse the guilt seemed to be. I'd look at his smiling face and feel so much self hatred that I could ever dream of terminating him. Oscar is 5 months old now and whilst I'm still dealing with these issues, I'm starting to see now that it wasn't that I didn't want my baby, it was that I didn't want to be ill anymore and I'm now learning to separate the two.

I started following PSS on facebook quite early on. I'm ashamed to admit that I didn't seek help from a peer supporter for the fear of being judged on how I felt. I now know that this was a massive mistake on my part. I read about other sufferers stories and this was my therapy, to read in black and white that someone was going through the exact same as me.

I made a promise to myself that I would do all I could to help women who are going through this awful underestimated condition. To help them to see that it's ok to not succumb to what society says and that all pregnant women should be jumping for joy. To those that don't have that wonderful and blooming journey, to help those that like me, were terrified of scans because of the fear they'd be told there was no heartbeat because your body isn't strong enough to cope anymore.

I'm now supporting my first lady and can honestly say it's the most rewarding thing I've done. My only hope is that I can help her to feel it's ok to feel the way she does and hopefully minimise the feelings of guilt through her pregnancy and when her baby arrives.