

## My NVP Experience

I remember so clearly seeing the positive sign on the pregnancy test, a rush of emotions came to me, joy, trepidation, excitement...never did I see what lay ahead.

Within a week of taking the test, at around 7 weeks pregnant the vomiting started. The constant nausea with no relief. Working in retail, at Christmas, the busiest time of the year I tried every day to get to work not wanting to let my colleagues down. Many days I had to call in sick as I couldn't leave my bathroom never mind showering and getting ready for the day ahead. On the days that I did make it in I'd vomit in little bags on the bus, dry heaving as those around stared at me, vomiting in the street; the lack of control and feeling at my bodies mercy. Once in work I couldn't do my job, been sick in bins and mop buckets if I couldn't make it to the toilet or if it was in use. I remember trying to have a meeting with a member of staff and what should have taken 15 minutes took over an hour as I had to leave to dry heave and vomit so many times. At around 16 weeks pregnant I discovered that my colleagues had complained about me, my absences and lack of ability to do my job if I made it in. That hurt. I was trying to function as best as I could.

I thought that it was just me, surely everyone felt like this during pregnancy?

I convinced myself that I wasn't strong enough mentally and that was why I was finding this so much harder. The comments of "Haven't you tried ginger, sickness bands, nibbling biscuits...?" the list of these so called magical cures rang in my head. Trying them all, again I wondered if it was just I that was not up to the job of been pregnant and creating life. As my pregnancy continued comments of "Surely your sickness should have stopped by now?" and "I thought morning sickness stopped after 16 weeks" made me feel like I was failing. Every day was the same, constant nausea, dry heaving and vomiting with people's words ringing in my mind as I continued to believe that I was not mentally strong enough for this. For days at a time the only thing that I could stomach were Fruit Pastal Ice Lollies. We always had a box in the freezer and my partner would bring them home for me, one of these things that he could actively do to help. At my midwife appointments I played down the NVP and how I was feeling for fear her confirming my fear that it was only me who felt like this and that I was not up to creating life. My ketone levels were always considered within normal range so, of course, my midwife did not offer treatment. My job was in retail sales, I sell every day, selling the idea that I felt fine to my midwife was just another role that I played.

At roughly 34 weeks pregnant the vomiting, nausea and dry heaves became less frequent.

Happening two or three times a day, occasionally a whole day would go by without any.

I discovered Pregnancy Sickness Support UK through a friend that I met at a baby massage class. She had had Hyperemesis Gravidarum throughout her pregnancy. I attended the organisation's conference and as I sat listening to other women's experiences of HG and NVP I realised that I had not been alone in my experience, that what I had suffered was not "normal" pregnancy sickness and that my feeling were valid.

A few months later I became pregnant again. Very soon the nausea, vomiting and dry heaving began. This time around I knew that the chances of me having NVP again were high and that it would probably be stronger this time around. With this in mind, combined with the knowledge that I had gained via Pregnancy Sickness Support UK, I felt able to tell people exactly how NVP affected me throughout pregnancy and that it wouldn't disappear after an allotted time. I made my immediate colleagues aware of the fact that I was pregnant and that even though it was still in the very early stages they needed to know. As their faces beamed and congratulations rang out I found it difficult to share their joy, I knew what was to come my way. However saying the words "I suffer with severe nausea and vomiting during pregnancy" with conviction was oddly empowering. I was able to tell them that this was a real, potentially serious health issue and that I needed their support.

This time around I did not want to feel shame and try to hide myself away.

This second pregnancy the symptoms increased in frequency and strength. The Fruit Pastel Lollies quickly appeared in the freezer. A sick bag with me at all times was a necessity. I also had a two year old to look after.

Fortunately this time around my employer and colleagues were far more supportive. Countless hours sat in the dark of the staff room toilets, hoping that the sickness would end. When these thoughts entered my head I would then panic and remind myself that this baby was wanted and that I did not want my pregnancy to end, just for the vomiting to stop, for my body not to ache with nausea just for a few minutes. I still felt incredibly guilty for allowing these thoughts to enter my head. It was also difficult to truly believe that my colleagues were genuinely supportive and that they were not going to make me start maternity leave very, very early. Drinking bottles of water to keep hydrated and enable this baby to grow and thrive whilst simultaneously bringing back up the liquid that we needed. Many days I would get the bus to work, retching into my sick bags, walking as fast as I could to work to make it to vomit in the toilet instead of the street, try to do my job and manage an hour at the most before repeating the journey home to vomit in my own toilet instead.

Those bus journeys could feel as though they went on forever, sometimes the simple sight of someone eating would cause the familiar contraction in my throat to begin.

My two year old learnt quickly when I was about to wretch or vomit. As I would lean over the toilet, sink, bin, whatever was available; her little hand would rest on my back with the words "It's ok Mummy, I'm here". At times I craved to be alone during this process but seeing this empathetic, caring side to my child was one of the saving graces of this intense NVP. When she would wake during the night instead of my first thought been to go to her it would be of the wave of sickness rising and making a split second choice if to tend to her needs first or run to the toilet and hope that this would be a quick trip enabling me to get to her as I would like to. Those waves of nausea during the night were hard; occasionally I would wake and have a few seconds before the sensation would become apparent to me. I can still remember the relief of those moments.

With this pregnancy the NVP continued until the birth of my baby. At 17-19 weeks pregnant it eased but swiftly returned and stayed firmly put. I made my midwife aware of the fact that I was suffering with NVP. At each appointment she would test my urine and my ketones were always within the range that is considered "safe". I'm unsure as to how this happened. I had two UTI's, during these my ketones levels were not as they should be but whilst in hospital told to "drink and eat plenty" and not considered to be ill enough to receive treatment. Each time I took myself home and went

back to consuming the ice lollies. After the birth I remember cuddling my new born and as he fed realising that for the first time in 40 weeks I did not feel sick, the thought of eating did not fill me with dread, I did not worry if the smell of something would suddenly bring on more nausea. I had forgotten what normal felt like; I couldn't believe that the NVP had stopped.

My beautiful babies are now three years old and five months old. The experience of NVP is embedded deep in my mind. I sometimes feel as though I missed out on a positive pregnancy experience, much of my memory of pregnancy is scarred by NVP and this is the overriding memory of the times that I spent carrying my babies. I will always discuss and be honest about my pregnancies. Both of my babies have shown me just how strong I can be.