

# Acute fatty liver of pregnancy: a woman's story

By Marjorie Nimis

In August 2004 I got pregnant for the first time. I was what my midwife would have called a 'healthy 26-year-old female'. I drank a unit or two of alcohol about every two weeks, occasional smoker (to accompany those drinks), weighed a healthy nine and a half stones for five foot three. The first trimester of my pregnancy was very much textbook. At my booking visit I had a scan to check the pregnancy and was more than surprised to discover I was expecting twins, since there are none on either side of the family.

Around 16 weeks I started itching all over my body (legs, arms, stomach) without any signs of rash. It was assumed it was caused by the pressure on my liver. The boys were quite big. I found Calomine lotion gave the best results.

At 30 weeks my fluid intake began to increase steadily. At first it was only during the day, then also at night. I had a glucose tolerance test which showed I was normal at this stage. By 35 weeks I was drinking ten litres in a day and three at night. I was not able to eat 'normal' food either, because everything tasted so dry and I had been suffering from heart burn for a few weeks and no medication seemed to help. I was eating cereals in milk four times a day. All the time I was drinking yet I continually felt thirsty.

At 36 weeks and 6 days I woke up with half of my face paralysed. The muscles on the left side of my face were slack. I was taken to hospital and diagnosed with Bell's Palsy and given a course of steroids. At this stage I was feeling really sluggish and detached from the events around me. I was sleeping a lot and I had lost my appetite. I had been vomiting for a few days in a row, had cramps in my stomach and I felt a bit shaky. My babies' hearts were checked but they seemed fine. I was showing signs of Braxton hicks so to my relief the end of my pregnancy seemed close.

At 37 weeks my waters broke and I went into labour. A caesarean was scheduled as both babies were breech. While being monitored the boys started showing signs of distress. My smallest twin, twin 1, eventually went flat. I was rushed into theatre for a caesarean under general anaesthesia. Both boys had to be resus-

citated. Twin 1, Micah, was born with severe neonatal encephalopathy and twin 2, Sasha, with moderate neonatal encephalopathy.

While I was recovering from the anesthesia a team worked for hours trying to find out what had happened. A liver function test showed that my liver was to blame. I was then diagnosed with Acute Fatty Liver (AFLP), which explained my comatose state, the lack of appetite, the stomach pains, the vomiting, the babies' cardiac arrests but also why I was becoming jaundiced and swollen after the caesarean. I was hooked up to a blood pressure monitor, I had a neck line inserted and I was given blood as well as plasma. One of the complications due to AFLP was that I had problems with my clotting, which is obviously quite serious after a caesarean. I was also diagnosed with Diabetes Insipidus, which explained the amount of fluid intake for the last six weeks, the constant thirst and that, though I was drinking so much, I was actually dehydrate I was put in HDU for 24-hour care.

On the same day the neonatal team told my husband that our smallest twin, Micah, would not survive. The extensive brain damage made it impossible for him to sustain his own body needs. He had fits and just never gained consciousness. We were heart broken. Each day with him was a bonus. He died when he was six days old, peacefully in my hospital bed, in his mum and dad's arms.

Sasha was doing well but there was no certainty about how his brain had been affected by the lack of oxygen. MRI scan and ultrasounds were normal but at one-month of age he was still floppy, with low muscle tone and no head control. He was a very placid baby rarely crying. But he seemed aware of his surroundings and was good at feeding despite his first two weeks spent being fed by naso-gastric tube while sedated with Phenobarbital.

I had to have another operation to remove blood clots and it took days after the surgical interventions for me to be able to walk. It also took some time to work out the right dosage of DDAVP for the DI. My liver repaired itself very quickly and my Bell's Palsy did not leave 'obvious' traces. I was viewed as a walking miracle in the hospital and lots of the nurses

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decided to look up AFLP and talked about it at their classes.

Sasha has 'global developmental delay', consistent with cerebral palsy. I have been healthy since my hospital stay and I am now 20 weeks' pregnant after having a miscarriage in June. I am cared for by the same obstetrician in addition to a high risk midwifery team. Liver problems are a possibility though not a strong one but LFTs will be done weekly from my third trimester onwards. I have an appointment with an endocrinologist booked for 30 weeks.

It has been a very traumatic experience for my whole family and friends. We had never thought that something like this could happen to us. I felt numb the first few weeks. Micah's funeral helped me to open up a bit but I had a baby to look after and a husband who needed me. Still now I don't think I have mourned as much as I needed to and Sasha's condition feels so unfair on top of it all. Having more children was always on the agenda though; we won't let AFLP stop us from having the family we want. I am now waiting for my third trimester to start and see how things go. I would love to do the things I wasn't able to do the first time: have a vaginal birth and breastfeed my baby. And if all goes well our dream is to have four children! **BJM**