

INSPIRING HOPE

Christine Bryant - "Pregnancy-induced heart failure"

About a month after the birth of my second child, I was diagnosed with peripartum cardiomyopathy - a rare form of heart failure that occurs during pregnancy or immediately after delivery.



It was stunning. Yet, the thought of leaving my two young children frightened me the most - even more than the diagnosis itself.

Looking back at this life-changing moment, I wonder how much I should have - or could have - known. In my third trimester, I experienced symptoms that were brushed off as "typical," including shortness of breath and weight gain.

It wasn't until a few weeks after delivery that my symptoms worsened - just carrying my daughter to the changing table left me feeling like I had just run around the block.

My doctor ordered an echocardiogram, and the results showed my ejection fraction had dipped to 23 percent. A normal, healthy heart has an EF of about 60 percent. My heart was enlarged and couldn't pump blood properly to the rest of my body. To make matters worse, doctors also found a blood clot in my heart, and a few weeks after my diagnosis, I suffered a stroke - just as my daughter was turning 2 months old.

I quickly recovered, though in the hospital my EF dipped to 13 percent. My recovery from peripartum cardiomyopathy has been much slower, however. I eventually received an ICD since I was at greater risk for sudden cardiac death.

It's been two years since my diagnosis, and while my EF has improved to 40 percent, my heart has not yet healed. For some women it never does.

Peripartum cardiomyopathy affects 1,000 to 1,300 women in the United States each year. Many recover within a few months of diagnosis, while others take years. Some don't fully recover - living with it their entire lives - and others die before they learn of their condition.

There's no definitive cause. A heart pumps up to 50 percent more blood during pregnancy, and with certain risk factors (in my case, over the age of 30 in my second pregnancy), that combination can place additional stress on the heart. Prior to two years ago, I had never heard of this condition. That's something I'm hoping to change for others - so that every mother can watch her child grow.

If you've had a similar experience, or would just like to talk to Christine about peripartum cardiomyopathy, her contact information is listed below!

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