

Hannah's story

I had my first faint at 17 getting out of the bath, I felt my heart flutter at what felt like 200bpm, I became dizzy, sick and slowly my hearing and vision became a blur. I woke up on the bathroom floor some time later. Following this I saw my GP. Having a cardiac history as a child my GP was very concerned and ordered a 24hr ECG and referred me onto a cardiologist at my local hospital. I had no further fainting episodes and began to feel a lot better. At my consultation with the consultant he assured me that the 24hr tape was normal and he was sure I had suffered a "simple faint". I was so relieved to hear this having spent a lot of time in hospital as a child with heart problems.



A few years past and I had completely forgotten about the fainting until I began to feel unwell in Asda whilst doing my weekly shop. Upon standing after kneeling to pick something up from the bottom shelf I felt palpitations and all the other symptoms came flooding back. I blacked out. When I came round I felt sick and tired. I happened to be my own and this was a scary experience and one that I will always remember. The next day I visited my GP again, who re-referred me to the cardiologist. I was 19 at this point and I found myself experiencing a wide range of medical tests. I received a week long heart monitor, an echocardiogram and a tilt table test. Shortly after receiving these tests I was called back to see the consultant. Something was up. I was told that my heart monitor showed a stable rhythm but with frequent tachycardia (unrelated to exercise). The echocardiogram was all ok, thankfully. The tilt table test was positive for PoTS, I had a dramatic increase in heart rate with a drop in blood pressure.

Over the next few years things went from bad to worse, I was fainting in the road, once almost hit by a car, at work and on stage with my local dance school. Despite all this I was managing to continue a normal but adjusted lifestyle. Not able to work anymore I would spend my time doing whatever I felt able to do that day. At a follow up appointment at hospital I was started on fludrocortisone and midodrine. I was very pessimistic about taking these tablets; I could not see how these would help me. To my surprise I began to get better and better and within weeks I was almost symptom free, no blackouts and no palpitations. I returned to work, went out with my friends, bought a house with my now husband and all was well.

One day my whole life changed, I was pregnant! Very excited I phoned my GP to ask for advice on my medication. He advised me to discontinue it. By the time I was 8 weeks pregnant I was very unwell. After fainting at home I sustained a head injury and was hospitalised. I could not walk, dress myself, or do any basic living

tasks without assistance. Also suffering from hyperemesis, I could not eat or even swallow water without vomiting. My days consisted of IV fluids, anti -emetics and lots of sleep. It was exhausting growing a baby!

Returning home from hospital my partner took on the role as my carer, I depended on him for nearly everything. He would cook, clean and do all the housework whilst working full time and looking after me. It was not long before I was back in hospital. This continued all through the pregnancy. Despite all this I delivered a healthy baby boy at 40 weeks. After the pregnancy I felt better than I had felt in years. I was enjoying my new life at home, I married and we had a lovely family life.

I soon fell pregnant again, this time I knew what to expect. To my surprise I felt ok until about 16 weeks. I started to feel tired, short of breath and the palpitations were back. After being well for so long I was sent for an echocardiogram, this showed that the valves in my heart were starting to regurgitate blood the wrong way. As my pregnancy progressed I became increasingly tired and it became a struggle. I was not going to let PoTs get me down again though. Despite having blackouts I continued to work full time at my local community hospital. This gave me contact, and also someone to moan too. Without the support of my lovely colleagues I am not sure how I would have got through the pregnancy! At 39 weeks pregnant I delivered a healthy baby boy by c-section. My life was complete, I was so happy.

I am now 23 years old and have learnt over the years to manage this condition well but without the support of my friends and family there could have been a very different outcome. I have the most loving husband, beautiful children and best friends that accept that this condition is part of me and do not judge.

I am not sure what the future will hold for me but I am sure that I will be a stronger person because of this experience.

Hannah Cookson, Ward Clerk, 23