

Looking back to the day before my SCAD I think of how happy I felt. I had not long turned 41 and had recently given birth to my third son, James who was just 10 days old. A girlfriend had visited that day and we had sat for a few hours chatting away and enjoying James and I remember saying to her how together I felt and that motherhood was coming to me much easier this time round.

Having a family has not come without a lot of heartbreak for my husband Brett and I. After a couple of miscarriages and a molar pregnancy we finally fell pregnant with our first son, Benjamin after three rounds of IVF. Ben was born via emergency caesarean at 36 weeks however our joy tragically turned to grief when we lost him 2 hours after birth. We subsequently learned that he had a rare genetic condition called X-Linked Myotubular Myopathy which is not compatible with life for males and for which I am a carrier. This meant that we had to start the IVF process all over again but this time with a genetic component to add to the complexity. Our grief turned to joy following the birth of our rainbow baby boy, William in November 2014. All of my children have been by caesarean.

My SCAD occurred in the early hours of 12 December 2016.

I had only been home from hospital 4 days when I woke just after midnight with what I would describe as a heartburn feeling in my chest. I had just had my first Lite 'n' Easy meal for dinner the night prior so thought it might have been something in the meal that wasn't sitting right. The pain though was enough to wake me and make me sit up. I remember looking at the clock and thinking that I had a few hours until the next feed and wished that the pain would pass quickly. It didn't and soon I had some discomfort between my shoulder blades and a sudden feeling that I wanted to be sick. I got out of bed and went to the bathroom to be sick and then went to the kitchen and took a couple of Panadols and went and sat back on the bed. The pain in my chest was now becoming unbearable, an incredible pressure, and then the pain started to spread along my jaw. I looked over to my husband who was sound asleep and wondered if I should wake him. Sleep is so precious when you have a newborn and I honestly thought it would subside. After about 10 minutes of this excruciating pain I did wake him but that was only because by then I had pain going down my left arm which I knew was not a good thing. He immediately called the ambulance which at the time I thought was a bit melodramatic but I went with it. Worst case I thought I might have had a post-op clot from the caesarean but at no time did I think it was a heart attack!

When the ambulance arrived, just after 1.00am, they were very quick in doing an ECG and getting me to put a GTN tablet under my tongue. The ECG showed only a slight irregularity but they wanted to take me to hospital for a full assessment. I really did feel like the paramedics and my husband were being a bit over the top with wanting me to go to hospital however I begrudgingly agreed to go on the basis that I could be there, assessed and back home in a couple of hours as I had a newborn photoshoot booked for the following morning that I couldn't reschedule.

On arrival at the Emergency Department the pain had completely gone. Bloods were taken and I was hooked up to monitoring devices. There I just laid and waited and texted my husband with updates as I had them and told him I would just get a cab home when I was discharged so he didn't have to wake the boys. A repeat blood test was done a couple of hours later after which a doctor came and sat down next to me and told me that much to their surprise my Troponin levels had tripled and that meant that I had had a cardiac event and needed to be admitted to the cardiac ward.

What? The cardiac ward? No taxi home, no newborn photoshoot for me.

Over the course of the next couple of hours I frequently heard myself being referred to as the "41-year-old female, 10 days post partem" and got a real sense of urgency from the medical staff. By 11.00am I was being prepped for an angiogram (fortunately through my wrist and not my groin). All this time I was alone and still texting my husband. It was all so surreal and I had not grasped the severity of the situation.

I was awake during the angiogram and it was during the procedure that the cardiologist leaned over to me and explained that I'd had a cardiac event and there was a 3cm tear in my circumflex artery. This tear could not be treated by a stent or balloon as it could possibly tear further so I would be treated with medication.

Over the course of the next five days I was on bed rest in the cardiac ward and closely monitored. My husband and I had agreed not to bring James into the hospital although I missed him desperately. I cried continuously and couldn't believe what was happening. The word dissection was used a lot but I really didn't know what it all meant. Cardiac issues were not in my family and it was not like I was surrounded by the jargon that was used on a daily basis. I knew that I had suffered a SCAD and that it was a rare condition believed to affect some women post birth but that was pretty much it. On the day of discharge, I was told in summary that I had to take things really gently, not to lift my toddler at all, not to walk up hills and any walks could be no greater than 5 minutes. I was given a list of medications that I needed to take and an appointment with my cardiologist for six weeks' time.

Unfortunately, I ended up back in emergency 12 hours later with another heart attack as I didn't do as was asked and took myself shopping for my Christmas present on the way home from hospital. This time back in the cardiac ward they were a lot firmer with me. I recall the cardiologist saying to me that "he thought it might happen again" which was a piece of information that I would have appreciated. I was on complete bed rest and had to negotiate with the nursing staff to be allowed to have a shower with a compromise of a seated shower. Another five days later and with a lot of negotiation (also a few days before Christmas) I was allowed to go home. This time very aware of how serious my health situation was.

At the time I went through a whole spectrum of emotions. Denial at what was happening but more so anger and sadness. Why? I wasn't your typical cardiac patient and certainly not in the age bracket (or so I thought) for it. A lot of tears were shed in the coming months and a hint of anxiety that it might happen again.

I had grand plans for myself whilst being on maternity leave this time and this included a vigorous exercise program to get my body back to my pre-baby shape. This of course all went out the window. I did attend a rehabilitation program through the hospital in the new year which was a great way to get me back to gentle exercise in a supervised forum.

Almost six months on and nearly time for my next cardiologist review I am feeling a lot better and hoping to reduce the number of medications I am on. To look to the positive side of things it has changed me as a person. I am so much more calm, appreciative and grateful. I don't sweat the small things like I used to. I look at my sons with new eyes and a love greater than no other. I know I am a better mother because I am meant to be here.