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THE GREEN SIDE OF PREGNANCY, BECKY DICKINSON LOOKS INTO
TIMES WHEN MORNING SICKNESS BECOMES SERIOUS

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IT WAS UNCONTROLLABLE, I COULDN'T STOP BEING SICK OR KEEP ANYTHING DOWN FOR NINE MONTHS. I WAS TOLD TO JUST EAT A GINGER BISCUIT

Here at Baby London we are beyond excited at the news that the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are expecting their second baby. But the medical details of Kate's pregnancy have once again been thrown into the spotlight, as she is forced to cancel her public engagements due to acute morning sickness, or hyperemesis gravidarum, to give the condition its official title.

But what exactly is this most unwelcome, though fortunately rare, side effect of pregnancy and can anything be done? In simple terms, hyperemesis means 'vomiting a lot' and gravidarum means 'in pregnancy'. The condition causes severe sickness which can lead to dehydration, weight loss and a build-up of toxins in the blood or urine called ketosis. Symptoms may also include low blood pressure and fast heart rate, headaches, lethargy or confusion.

Kate is no stranger to the sick bowl. The 32 year old suffered with the vomiting

condition during her last pregnancy with Prince George in 2012. Unfortunately, if a woman experiences hyperemesis gravidarum in her first pregnancy, it is highly likely that she will have it again. What's more, the affliction is generally worse in subsequent pregnancies and has an earlier onset. So it's no surprise that Kate is suffering once again.

Tracey Ballantyne, 43, from Ottershaw, Surrey, knows just how she feels. She suffered from hyperemesis gravidarum with all three of her pregnancies. She says, "It was uncontrollable, I literally couldn't stop being sick or keep anything down for nine months." Tracey's first daughter is now 11 and Tracey believes back then the condition wasn't taken seriously. "I was just told it would pass and to eat a ginger biscuit." It wasn't until Tracey was severely dehydrated and bringing up green vomit that she was admitted to hospital and placed on a drip. Isla was born four weeks early weighing just 4lb 10oz – a direct result, Tracey believes, of



The Duchess of Cambridge is suffering with hyperemesis gravidarum for a second time



PHOTOGRAPH BY © TONY BURTON/GETTY IMAGES

the hyperemesis. Although she suffered with the condition in her two subsequent pregnancies, she was given better care and admitted to hospital earlier.

She says, "I was monitored more and was offered anti-sickness tablets although I decided not to take them."

While some morning sickness is seen as a relatively normal part of pregnancy, little is known about its far more debilitating cousin. Hyperemesis gravidarum is much worse than morning sickness. It affects about 0.3 to 1.5 per cent of pregnancies, which equates to around three (and a half) of every 1,000 pregnant women. So what causes some women to spend hours, weeks and months crouched over the loo, while others enjoy a healthy glow?

Mr Tary Boret, consultant gynaecologist obstetrician for Spire Bushey Hospital in north London says, "Hyperemesis gravidarum is due to a combination of factors which may vary between women and include genetics, body chemistry and overall health. There are numerous theories regarding the cause, but the actual cause is not known. One theory is an adverse reaction to the hormonal changes of pregnancy, in particular, elevated levels of beta human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG). This theory would also explain why hyperemesis gravidarum (HG) is most frequently encountered in the first trimester (often around eight to 12 weeks of gestation), as hCG levels are highest at that time and decline afterward. Another

postulated cause of HG is an increase in maternal levels of oestrogens – decreasing intestinal motility and gastric emptying leading to nausea and vomiting."

So can anything be done to try and minimise the symptoms? Unfortunately, there is no panacea for combating nausea during pregnancy. The main advice is to stay hydrated and eat small, frequent and plain meals. Some women find alternative therapies helpful such as acupuncture, hypnotherapy, travel sickness bands, eating ginger and other herbal remedies.

Yet in the most severe cases, the only option may be admission to hospital. This is necessary for women who are vomiting almost constantly and unable to keep any nutrients down. In these cases, they may be treated with intravenous fluids and anti-sickness tablets.

Tony Boret says, "If vomiting is very severe, it can be dangerous for the mother and can cause a condition called Wernicke's encephalopathy and may also affect the kidneys but this is very rare and usually the condition is self-limiting. Malnutrition and other serious complications, such as fluid or electrolyte imbalances, may result. Occasionally if the mother continues to suffer from hyperemesis for a prolonged period, it can affect growth of the foetus."

Former hyperemesis sufferer, Tracey, now has three healthy children. However she admits the condition does leave a blemish on what is supposed to be a special time in a woman's life. "I hated being pregnant and carrying a sick bag on the train to work every day. It does spoil it."

So while the world waits with baited breath for news of another heir to the throne, our hearts go out to Kate and we hope she will soon be feeling better and able to enjoy the rest of her pregnancy. Meanwhile, the Duchess of Cambridge can take comfort in the fact that her suffering is helping raise awareness and understanding of this horrible condition. That, and the knowledge that in a few months time she will have a beautiful baby in her arms. **10**

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH NAUSEA DURING PREGNANCY

- Try to have small, frequent meals and snacks. Nausea tends to be worse on an empty stomach
- Keep hydrated. Sip small amounts of fluids through the day
- Stick to cold, plain foods and avoid hot, spicy or fatty ones
- Sip or suck on ginger flavoured sweets and drinks
- Stay out of the kitchen during cooking time to avoid strong aromas. If possible ask someone else to help prepare meals
- Avoid eating and drinking at the same time – this may make nausea worse