

Mum counts herself lucky with two boys



Health watch

TRINA McGowan considers herself one of the lucky ones.

Pre-eclampsia might have turned her first pregnancy into a life-threatening nightmare and cast a shadow of fear over her second, but she has two healthy little boys despite it.

The mysterious illness is the most common serious medical disorder of pregnancy, affecting up to 10 per cent of expectant mothers.

It can threaten the lives of both mother and baby: about 200 babies die because of it each year.

The disorder, which usually develops during the second half of pregnancy, often causes high blood pressure and protein in the urine.

If untreated, it can lead to convulsions, kidney failure, liver failure and blood clots.

Ms McGowan was 25 weeks pregnant with first son Nicholas when her blood pressure started to climb.

At 27 weeks, she felt so unwell, and had pain under her ribs and in her back, that she went to Dandenong Hospital.

"My blood pressure was up so much I should have had a stroke," she said.

Medication brought her blood pressure down enough for her to be transferred to the Mercy Hospital for Women, where baby Nicholas was born by caesarean, weighing just 818g.

It would be eight days before Ms McGowan and husband Brett could hold their tiny son.

They almost lost him when his lung collapsed at three weeks, and again a few days later when he developed a pneumothorax, in which air is

Kamahl Cogdon

trapped between the chest wall and lung.

Nicholas, now four, fought on and went home to Lynbrook at 13 weeks old.

Ms McGowan said she and her husband were apprehensive about having a second baby, but were told if pre-eclampsia occurred again it would likely be less severe and later in the pregnancy.

Baby Flynn, now three months, was born by caesarean at 38 weeks after Ms McGowan's blood pressure again began to rise. He weighed a healthy 2835g.

Ms McGowan said although her experiences were terrifying, she felt blessed to have two healthy sons.

"We are lucky we had such a good outcome. So many people don't," she said. "Being in the special-care nursery, you see that."

Royal Women's Hospital director of perinatal medicine Prof Shaun Brennecke said the cause of pre-eclampsia remained a mystery and it was often difficult to detect until too late.

He said symptoms, such as headache, excessive swelling and stomach pain, were often dismissed by mothers-to-be as normal discomforts of pregnancy.

"That's where having regular check-ups and seeking advice from your doctor, midwife or hospital is so important," said Prof Brennecke, who is working with US researchers to find a cure for pre-eclampsia.

Net link: www.aapec.org.au



Difficult pregnancies: Trina McGowan with sons Nicholas and Flynn. Picture: NORM OORLOFF