“from a seed a flower blooms as do people who blossom in life”

Eating Disorders
And
Pregnancy

Nov 2014

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The Purpose

To help and support people who have an eating disorder, and are pregnant, deal with the excitement and changes that are about to happen to them, both emotionally and physically.

SEED HAVE SEEN THE BIRTH OF 5 ‘SEED’ BABIES

By that we mean five past sufferers have been blessed with having babies. 3 little boys and 2 baby girl.

We are delighted as we have seen them move forward with their illness, and have been privileged to support them through their journey’s!

ALL babies are special, but to come through an eating disorder to have a child to cherish makes them, to us, very special indeed!

We have asked mums to contribute to this booklet in order that we can support others.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to the wonderful Claire who has written a blog. Claire has recently had a little girl called India born on the 4th September 2011 weighing 9lbs 7oz!

A massive thank you to the lovely Nicki who we have seen flourish, and who is expecting her little boy near Christmas and to have her 2nd baby in the New Year

To Elaine, the gorgeous mum of five children! Elaine is inspirational as she tells us of her journey when she was pregnant.

To the wonderful Katie who has provided her story and allowed us to use the pictures of Baby Adam and to celebrate the birth of baby Charlie more recently.

The lovely Nina and her baby Isaac for sharing her story and pictures in the hope it will help others in the same position.

Anyone can Google ‘Eating Disorders and Pregnancy’ and we have done just that, but only to signpost to what we consider, is practical and informative.

This booklet gives first hand accounts from mum’s or mum’s-to-be who have contributed to this Resource. We hope for this to be on-going and for others to contribute in the future

If you are pregnant, have an eating disorder and need support, don't suffer in isolation.

We are here to support you with the eating disorder.

Your midwife is there to support you with your pregnancy!

Helpline 01482 718130 www.seedeatingdisorders.org.uk
Claire’s Story …

“Finding out I was pregnant was one of the greatest moments in my life. Previously, I have suffered several miscarriages which may have been caused by my eating disorder. This time I was determined to have a healthy pregnancy and baby.

To me, it wasn’t an option to not challenge the thoughts of the eating disorder and loose this baby.

That doesn’t mean that its been an easy road and my eating disorder has been there waiting to trip me up on many occasions.

I guess one of the biggest challenges I’ve had is pregnancy weight gain and watching my body change shape. I’ve gone from been so in control of my weight to not having any control about what’s gone on and because I was underweight before pregnancy, I’ve had to put more weight on to be able to carry my baby safely. The thing that helped me to settle with this thought was looking at a normal pregnancy weight breakdown with my CPN. I was able to look and link what weight was baby, what was water, etc.

The other biggest challenge was getting rid of all my behaviours. The purging, laxatives, restriction and bingeing. Again, although these stopped I had the ‘ED’ voice waiting at every chance to tell me that I should be using behaviours to stop the weight gain and to have control.

Planning for three meals a day and snacks and keeping this regular to feed baby helped stop the urge to binge. Therefore, compensatory behaviours weren’t needed as I hadn’t lost control, but I have had strong feelings of a loss of control by increasing my intake.

Having a scan picture on my phone to look at during these moments, or sitting and planning for baby distracted me during these times. It was motivation for the one thing myself and my husband had been wanting for years. Plus why should my eating disorder ruin another thing for me?

The last trimester has brought concerns about loosing my baby weight when she’s arrived, and has meant that I just need to remember to challenge my illness every time it tells me I should be trying to loose weight now.

I know rationally it is not safe and it is not healthy, but I want to be healthy when baby arrives and to be able to cope. I never want her to pick up on any issues or struggle like I have in the past. I want to be a role model and therefore need to choose recovery.

It has been really important for me to use my support network and be open in order to keep myself and baby safe!

I’d say, try to take one day at a time. Try to be around other mums-to-be and try to appreciate what your body is doing, just like they do.

Don’t put yourself down or beat yourself up if you have a blip.

Just pick yourself up and continue. Each meal should be like an achievement - a step closer to getting a healthy baby.”

http://cfseed-myjourney.blogspot.com
Nicki’s Story ...

“Even though I've been in ‘recovery’ for almost two years - maintaining a healthy, if on the low side of ‘normal’ weight, one of my first thoughts when I found out I was pregnant was “oh heck - I'm going to get fat!”

And I worried about getting fat quite a bit - until morning sickness hit - then my worry changed! I was very very sick - couldn't keep anything down, and ended up being hospitalised three times - at nine weeks, 13 weeks and 17 weeks. What amazed me about that time was how blasé the doctors and nurses were about me not eating anything! I mean, I was admitted after not managing to keep any food down for five days, and no fluid down for almost three days. Then they put me on "nil by mouth" for another three days while they rehydrated me with (calorie-free) saline.

It was me who was more worried about me not eating than they were! They knew about my history of an eating disorder but just kept telling me not to worry - that baby would be fine, and think of the starving women in Africa who manage to have babies. It was really strange that when the control of food was taken away from me, I panicked more about not-eating than I did about eating when I was the one in control!

So my fears about getting fat were never realised because I could hardly eat anything for weeks. I still developed a bump, and still needed to put away some trousers and invest in some bigger ones - which was the hardest part. But I did it by just going through my cupboards one day and putting all my old trousers into a suitcase and putting them in the attic. While I was in the attic I dug out all my bigger trousers that I'd worn when I'd gained a lot of weight on Olanzapine and started wearing those. It felt strange being back in my "big" trousers when I wasn't "big" all over - just my belly - but I got used to it. In fact, I threw away some of my tiniest trousers because I figured that I'd never get back into them post-baby. If I kept them it would encourage me to diet too much after he is born. That was during a rare "sensible head" moment!

Then, when I got to about 14 weeks, I just wanted a bump to show off!! Having a baby bump felt very different to feeling fat. It was solid - rather than squishy and that helped. Now I can't stop looking at it, touching it and wanting other people to notice it! At 21 weeks, people who don't know me still can't tell I'm pregnant and ask me where he's hiding. I'm eating now though and after weeks of not being able to eat much, I'm making up for lost time. I just have to eat what I can keep down - which is a lot of toast, crisps and carbohydrates but zero fruit and vegetables because that comes straight back up again. I've stopped looking at my "fat legs" and being obsessed with my weight because I can't stop thinking about the ‘little’ human that's growing inside and how I've got to look after him.

The strangest thing for me too was that I had never made myself sick when I had an eating disorder. I'd abused laxatives and risked my health that way, but I'd never made myself sick and here I was throwing up up to 20 times a day without wanting to. It did feel a bit ironic! I worried about my teeth and my electrolytes more than the doctors did. In fact, my GP just kept saying "you're not too dehydrated yet" (just by looking at me) when I went to see them three times in one week because I was feeling so rubbish. I ended up going to A&E on a Friday night and was admitted straight away for rehydration and stayed for five days. Seems it's not just eating disorders that are not taken seriously at GPs!”

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Elaine’s Story ...

**Being a Mum and Bulimia**

“I found out I was pregnant at the age of 18. Although I was elated, the fact that I was in the grips of bulimia set a big grey cloud over my good news, a special time for me spoilt by this awful illness.

I was a few weeks gone when I found out. I had been bingeing and purging for those weeks and it was another month or so before I managed to stop. I then embraced the fact I was eating for two and my god, did I eat for two! I put on about 4-5 stone, which in hindsight was a big mistake.

I enjoyed being pregnant but by the end I felt so large and was struggling with the voices in my head, telling myself I was fat and disgusting, I was hormonal and quite depressed.

I was always thinking that I don’t want people judging me because I was a young mum and wanted to be the “perfect mum”. Admitting that I was struggling with weight, stress and depression to anyone was out of the question. I gave birth to a beautiful little girl, Sasha. I have never felt happiness like that moment, and I was in a bubble of pure joy!

This happiness was soon clouded over with the discovery that my daughter was born with congenital cataracts. This happened when her eyes was developing in the womb. My instant thought was in those first few weeks and months when I was abusing my body, a time when my baby was developing, I was not giving her all the nutrients she needed. I will eternally feel guilty for this. I think I punish myself for this every day of my life. I enjoyed being a mum and threw myself into being a “perfect” mum. I nursed her, saw to her every need, neglected myself, and punished myself. Bulimia soon returned - I struggled to loose weight.

I was soon pregnant again with Poppy. This time I stopped the binging as soon as I found out and ate well for the first few months. Near the end of pregnancy I started restricting my food. I was scared of putting on too much weight. Poppy was five weeks premature. My fault I’m sure - time to beat myself up again, time to put on my act again, time to struggle on when I’m falling to bits inside. I was a mess after Pop was born. I didn’t sleep for weeks, I struggled to feed her, and I struggled to feed myself too. My weight dropped off. I never asked for help - my god I was so stubborn. I couldn’t let anyone know, I didn’t want to be a bad mum.

I pushed Olly away and his family too, even though they was being nice and just wanted to help. I was awful. I feel so sad thinking of these times as I was so terribly unhappy inside. These years were a blur; I look at photos now and struggle to remember things and special moments as I think I have blocked much of it out.

I left it a bit longer before I had my third; I was more stable by then and more relaxed. I was still in the grips of bulimia but much more chilled. I had a wonderful pregnancy and birth, ate well and didn’t put on much weight. I felt really good! Janey was such a good baby. I didn’t have to put on an act, and I was happy, my weight dropped off from breastfeeding and I looked radiant and looked slim. After 7-8months my weight started to creep up and old habits returned.

**Continued ...**
I was soon pregnant with Milly. I wanted that feeling back that I had had with Janey. I think my body had started to show signs of damage by this time. I was weak and kept getting kidney stones and infections and was always in and out of hospital. I nearly lost Milly early on and I was a wreck by the end. In hospital loosing the placenta and exhausted and weak after the birth, I remember all my joints aching. I think my body was so low on nutrient stores. I was feeding Milly which was taking all the goodness that I had left. I was eating quite healthy at the time but I was definitely showing the signs of years of damage. I made a decision not to have any more children - I didn’t think that my body could take anymore.

I had a big surprise when I found out I was expecting Theo! Older and wiser I think this was the point when I was starting to face up to the fact I had a big problem and that I wanted help. Another pregnancy in and out of hospital with kidney problems and then being a carer to my beloved Gran. I was her soul carer and she died while I was in hospital because of my stupid body! Horrible - I will never get over that. My fault again! A few weeks later I had Theo. I was very, very happy, but more determined then ever to get some help, although it was another year and a half before I did.

I wish I had sought help before I had children. I am so much happier now and feel that some of the best times and moments of my life have been ruined by bulimia. My god if I could go back. I put my babies at risk and myself at risk. I now worry about my children and I’m scared that they will have issues with food. They don’t at the moment. I try to hide my strange eating habits from them, but kids aren’t daft are they! I make sure I talk to them about their worries and teach them about how no one is perfect and how everyone is unique just how they are. I tell them all the things I should tell myself. One day I will be honest with them. I don’t really want to mention eating disorders to them just yet. They are, as far as I know, unaware of eating disorders. I just want my beautiful children to be happy. It’s tough, especially these days with airbrushed celebrities that they idolise, and there is such a pressure. I was once told by my doctor, “what about your children, think of your children”. While this is true, bulimia has such a hold that my doctor will never understand. My children are the best ever reason to get better but I have to do it for myself first!”
Katie’s Story ...

When I was gripped with my eating disorder (Anorexia), the furthest thing from my mind was the potential damage I was doing to my reproductive organs. This first entered my thought process when in recovery and in a stable relationship and we began thinking about starting a family.

Throughout my eating disorder I had received 100% support from my GP, so I went along to discuss with him the possibility of me being able to conceive and carry a baby. This was a concern since my period had stopped for two years, and when they did come back they were very irregular. So, because of my medical history I was offered the ‘test’ at a much earlier stage than an otherwise healthy woman would be. I was overjoyed when the results indicated that I would be able to conceive, and mightily relieved that my eating disorder hadn’t robbed me of my chance to become a mummy.

I remember the day I found out I was pregnant. It was a strange emotional cocktail of happiness and fright. Obviously I was excited about the positive result, but I was also frightened by the prospect that I was no longer in control of my own body. Above all else I knew that I had to eat and stay healthy, now not just for me, but also my unborn baby. Throughout the pregnancy it occurred to me that this was probably the first time in my life that I was comfortable with my body. I wasn’t fat, I had a little miracle growing inside me.

When Adam arrived seven weeks early, the old doubts raised their head again. Had my eating disorder caused him to come early? The doctors were quick to reassure me that this was not the case and Adam’s early arrival was just one of those things. This was a scary time for me, as I had to contend with having a premature baby coupled with it might be my fault. Adam is now nine weeks old and is thriving.

Losing my baby weight is proving a little difficult. It would be so easy for me to slip back into my old ways and control mechanisms, but I am staying strong, as I know that in time I will lose the weight. I am no longer an individual, but part of a family unit, so I simply can’t afford to go back to my old ways. My baby needs me to stay healthy so I can care for him. I have always been very much a creature of habit and have always had routines for everything. Since Adam arrived all structure has gone from my routines and I am struggling with this, but I will never ever return to my ways of old as I have to make Adam my priority. He’s my little miracle and I love him so much.
Nina’s Story

When I fell pregnant in August 2009, I felt a strange kind of happy terror. I had miscarried twice previously so I was acutely aware of what could go wrong; yet I also had no idea of what to expect about how my body and I would change over the next 9 months.

I have had an eating disorder in different forms since about the age of 14 or 15, and had blamed my miscarriages before Isaac on myself. I felt terribly guilty during this pregnancy and did everything I could to give my baby the best start possible.

I struggled with constant nausea yet still managed to eat a healthy amount of calories for me and my baby. I made sure I ate well over my 5 a day of fruit and vegetables, and relentlessly Google’d pregnancy super foods that might be extra important to eat.

I found many of my anorexic ‘restricting’ behaviours from before pregnancy actually helped me to do the opposite during the 9 months; for example I would write down a running calorie total on the back of my hand which I then used to make sure I had eaten enough, rather than its original purpose of seeing when I had eaten too much.

I stopped going to the gym altogether. Although many activities in the gym are great to do during pregnancy, it was just too much of a trigger and temptation for me. I was scared that I would get on a running machine and just not stop! So instead I found health (and free!) ways to keep active and feel better about my body. I walked a lot, discovered new routes around my flat and workplace. It cleared my head and energised me, and I made sure that if I burned off too much that I would eat to compensate for it.

I weighed myself infrequently as I was worried that it may become a trigger, however when I did step on the scales I found seeing the numbers go up as a positive sign. I tried to think of it as evidence that I was doing a good job. I gained a bit less than I should have done given my starting weight, yet both Isaac and myself remained healthy. The only noticeable difference in me at 40 weeks compared to early pregnancy was my massive bump—I didn’t really seem a lot different everywhere else!

Isaac was born 5 days overdue, weighing 7lbs 8oz on the 23rd May 2010. He was perfect and healthy, in stark contrast to me. I had picked up a dangerous hospital infection which meant that Isaac and I had to stay in the hospital for a further 11 days after birth for my intravenous antibiotics. I felt terrible physically and emotionally, and believe this experience played a large part in the depression I sunk into just a few weeks later.

Sleep deprivation, breastfeeding and coming to terms with my hospital experiences became very difficult to deal with and I found I had relapsed with my anorexia by August 2010. I found my GP unsympathetic, and it was a further 3 months of struggling before I was given the number for SEED Eating Disorder Support Services, which set in motion a series of meetings/workshops with their eating disorder services.
Nina’s story continued......

It has been a long journey since then, both as a mother and as a recovering anorexic. I honestly thought that if I had beaten anorexia in pregnancy, that afterwards would be a breeze, not that I would relapse. However I think that with the right support post-pregnancy, it could be avoided by others in my position and I would urge anyone to be pro-active in ensuring that the right people know about your worries and concerns post birth, and will be there for you if you need them.

I have learned more about myself since seeing that first positive test in August 2009 than I ever had in the 24 years before hand, and I am sure that Isaac will teach me more than I could ever imagine in the years to come. Its my job now to make sure that I will be there to learn from him!

“From a seed a flower blooms as do people who blossom in life”

“A baby is a new beginning of you!”

(If you would like to contribute to this booklet then please make contact through e mail)
Help and Support for Women Affected by Postnatal Depression

Below is a resume of what the House of Light is. They are not there just for postnatal depression - their organisation extends to a much wider service. This is a charity that is held in high esteem - they do a fantastic job and are there to support you ...

The House of Light helps women suffering from depression during pregnancy and is local to the Hull area.

House of Light is a registered charity that has been providing support, advice and information for women and their families affected by Postnatal Depression since 2007. Everyone at House of Light have experienced Postnatal illness and understand how debilitating it can be. Being a mum isn’t always easy at the best of times. Sometimes we all need someone to talk to. Don’t suffer in silence, we are here to help you through this difficult time. If you are pregnant and feeling low, depressed or anxious and you think you may be suffering with antenatal depression, please don’t hesitate to call us on: 0800 043 2031.

Useful Numbers

House of Light 0800 043 2031
Samaritans 08457 90 90 90
NHS Direct 0845 46 47
Crisis Pregnancy Centre Hull 01482 492 929

Experiencing an eating disorder has a devastating affect on the sufferer and a profound psychological effect on anyone who is part of their life.

Being pregnant and having an eating disorder calls for much closer monitoring both for yourself and the development of your baby.

An eating disorder is about ‘Feelings Not about Food’ and a pregnancy brings about many hormonal changes in itself.

Health visitors no longer routinely screen for postnatal depression but the House of Light do encourage you share your concerns, there are people there to help you. Mums with eating disorders may want to discuss this with their midwives.

It may be hard to know what is the eating disorder and what is the pregnancy! Make sure you are monitored closely both emotionally and physically. Your body and mind will go through lots of changes. Take time to learn more about changes through reputable websites and if it is eating disorder information you need, then please let SEED support you!