

As part of a new initiative called WOMEN, Shoppers Drug Mart has partnered with five organizations on the frontlines of women's health, including Motherisk, which provides trusted advice for pregnant women and their doctors. Read on for one woman's battle with excruciating nausea and the life-changing support that helped her pull through.

# I couldn't even keep down A SIP OF WATER

Paediatrician *Shawna Granovsky* was no stranger to morning sickness. But during her fifth pregnancy, she experienced such extreme, round-the-clock nausea that she didn't know how to cope. Fortunately, relief was a phone call away. AS TOLD TO KAREN ROBOCK

**AS SHE CLIMBED INTO THE MINIVAN AFTER GYMNASTICS CLASS** one afternoon, my 12-year-old daughter, Courtney, complained that I was late yet again. She was right, but I didn't want to tell her why: because I had to pull over down the block so I could throw up for the umpteenth time that day. During the first few months of my fifth pregnancy, I tried to hide my debilitating morning sickness from my kids. Eventually, though, they got used to me regularly stopping the car and sticking my head out the door. I'd experienced nausea and vomiting of pregnancy (NVP) with my other children – it lasted for eight months during my first pregnancy. I often had to throw up in between seeing patients

but nothing like what was happening now. One night, after a particularly bad day, I told my husband that I didn't think I could do it this time.

I was so nauseous, I couldn't keep down a sip of water – I even had trouble brushing my teeth. And I was growing concerned that I'd need to be hospitalized if I got too dehydrated – a risk factor for premature labour. I decided to call Motherisk's NVP helpline, a program of The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. I was referred to Caroline Maltepe, coordinator of the helpline, who assisted me through the next 15-plus weeks of intense nausea. I don't know what I would have done without her. ▶

I was already taking Diclectin – the only drug approved in Canada to specifically treat NVP – but it wasn't enough this time. (I even had to swallow the pill dry so I could keep it down.) One of Caroline's first suggestions was to almost double the recommended dosage. She had very strong research from Motherisk showing that this was safe, so we upped my dosage gradually. The other medications she suggested – which I had another physician prescribe – were Losec and Zantac, which treat acid reflux. I was surprised that she was recommending these meds until she explained that acid reflux can cause nausea for a lot of moms-to-be – which is something I'd never heard of before. When she named the symptoms – including a metallic taste in the mouth and a nauseous feeling in the back of the throat – it made perfect sense.

Caroline also helped me revamp my diet, referring me to a dietitian who had experience treating women with severe NVP. The dietitian suggested that I replace my usual afternoon snack (an apple) with one containing protein (such as nuts or cheese), which would even out my blood sugar levels and help control hunger and nausea. I also learned to eat smaller amounts more frequently so that I wouldn't go more than two hours without food. (Having an empty stomach triggered my nausea, which is apparently pretty common among women with severe NVP.) When I got home at night, I'd have one egg and half a piece of toast and then eat a little more an hour or so later. I also started taking a handful of crackers with peanut butter to bed with me – I'd line them up on my bedside table and eat them throughout the night. After a few weeks, I was eating almost constantly – it was the only thing that made me feel better – but I was still throwing up and having trouble with liquids. Caroline would check in daily to see how much I'd had to drink. I needed two litres of fluid each day, but I usually had trouble downing two glasses – even the sensation of swallowing made me feel sick.

One morning, after dropping my four kids off at school, I was so overcome with nausea that I had to pull over at a gas station. I was supposed to be working a long shift that day and I didn't know how I was going to do it. I called Caroline and she coached me through parking the minivan, walking into the store, buying two popsicles, getting back into the car and eating them slowly. When I got to work, I bought a fruit smoothie and carefully ate that with a spoon. Then I moved on to ice chips. She kept telling me that if I could take in more fluids I would feel better, but it was always so hard to do.

My symptoms finally started to subside and, at the 19-week mark, I was able to slowly ease off my medications. The last few months weren't nausea-free, but I was definitely feeling better and – thanks to reducing my dosage of Diclectin, which is known to cause drowsiness – I had a lot more energy. On December 16, 2010, I gave birth to a healthy baby girl named Chloe. I don't think I could have done it without Motherisk's help. At one point, I was talking to or emailing Caroline almost daily. She is the reason I was still able to be a mom, do my job and keep standing. 📧

## *what is NVP?*

Doctors aren't exactly sure what causes nausea and vomiting of pregnancy (NVP) – commonly referred to as morning sickness – but symptoms can strike at any time. As many as 80 percent of women struggle with NVP to varying degrees – though for most, symptoms only last for the first seven to 12 weeks of pregnancy and pose no threat to mom or baby. However, about one percent of pregnant women experience hyperemesis gravidarum, a more severe form of NVP, which can last longer – for some, right up until the baby is born. It can potentially lead to dehydration, as well as salt and mineral imbalances, putting both mother and baby at risk.

If you need help coping with any form of morning sickness, call Motherisk's NVP helpline at 1-800-436-8477.