

PREECLAMPSIA: AN OBSCURE WORD FOR HUMAN TRAUMA

Preeclampsia affects five to seven percent of pregnant women, a condition that can dramatically alter the much-anticipated experience of childbirth.



The first week of a baby's life can be an exceptionally challenging time for parents who have experienced preeclampsia. [Picture: unsplash](#)

It was supposed to be a routine pregnancy check. She had told everyone she'd be back midafternoon. She ended up coming back home a week later, having left her baby in an incubator.

At the vital moment of giving birth, the gulf between a future parent's expectations and reality is often huge. Sarah's experience was no exception. Five years ago, her eldest daughter's arrival shook her and her partner's lives forever. "During pregnancy, I guess it's normal to think about delivery. Of course, I had fears. Fear of being in pain, of the length, of fatigue. I had a certain ideal in mind; I was hoping for a quiet moment, with music and my partner by my side. I was also looking forward to it very much, and I hoped to be able to welcome my daughter in the most serene manner possible. We even took birth preparation courses to better understand how the event would take place."

Sarah and I met in her living room, over a cup of tea. Her children were visiting their grandparents. The atmosphere was calm, just what we needed to recall the events.

"I had been on sick leave for two weeks already, but I had made a breach in order to attend an exam. A few days later, I went to the hospital to check on the baby's growth because she didn't seem to be reaching the ideal weight. The obstetrician wasn't very happy about the results. He measured my blood pressure, which turned out to be much too high." From this moment, everything sped up for the future family. The specialist decided to keep her for monitoring and called the future father. Despite the medications, Sarah's pressure didn't lower a bit. Consequently, they decided to initiate an emergency C-section. "It was very overwhelming. It all happened very quickly, the professionals were busy around me, just like bees. But my memories are blurred; I was wearing sunglasses to reduce my pressure."

Sarah was suffering from preeclampsia. This pregnancy complication affects 5% of all expecting mothers and can be fatal in 10% of cases. It originates from the placenta, which develops defectively and secretes toxic substances, raising the mother's blood pressure. The baby's growth is slowed, and there is a risk of premature birth. That is what happened to Sarah's baby girl who, at 1.5 kg at birth, was kept in an incubator for numerous weeks. "I barely had time to see her, in her little bubble, before she was taken away with her father."

For many women, this illness and its consequences are hard to swallow. I asked Sarah what she felt today, five years afterward. "On the one hand, I feel extremely grateful for the caregivers who, I think, handled the situation very well. Without their intervention, I wouldn't be here today. But there is much more. Twenty-four hours later, I had a violent backlash; I realized afterward what happened and what risks my daughter and I had been exposed to. I felt guilty for not being able to offer a safe arrival for my daughter. I still carry this guilt to this day. There is also a lot of sadness that it didn't happen as I had wished. It all happened so quickly..." Sarah's voice trembles as she talks about her regrets, and only because I know her so well can I sense her sorrow.

Did this event influence her relationship with her daughter? "Of course. It has been so difficult; not only her birth but the whole start of her life, in the incubator. On my side, there's always this doubt of being a good mother, of being able to care for her. I have to admit I am still scared of having her taken away from me, just like she was after her birth. And afterward, while she stayed in the hospital for so long, it was hard to connect with her and find our place in her life. Usually, the parents are immediately the main points of contact, but clearly, we were not. The hospital personnel, who saw her more often, knew much more than we did, and we were mere observers. Our connection remains an issue today."

Sarah's greatest regret is likely not experiencing labor as she had envisioned. However, for some families, preeclampsia brings not only challenges but also tragedy and mourning. The young woman acknowledges her good fortune and expresses her joy at having survived and given birth to her beautiful daughter, who is now healthy and safe.