



The ileostomy & internal pouch

**Support Group**

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## **My Two Bumps – Baby & Hernia!**

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I thought some of the Journal's readers would be interested in the tale of two pregnancies as experienced by me, an ileostomist since 1995.

My surgery successfully changed my life from a painful one to a busy and fulfilling one after four agonising years of Crohn's disease. I married in May 2001 and was surprised but delighted to discover I was pregnant in the autumn of that year - surprised as I was aware of the difficulties some of my fellow ileostomists have had in trying to conceive, indeed, health professionals had hinted to me that I may not easily have children.

My first appointment with an obstetrician did not go well. He confirmed he had never had an ileostomist as a patient and his strategy seemed to be to ignore my stoma - I requested a change and although my new obstetrician had as little experience, he immediately wrote to my stoma surgeon for guidance. The main issue throughout this first pregnancy was a reluctance to allow me to give birth naturally - simply because if all went wrong, an emergency caesarean in a critical situation would be more complex than a planned (elective) caesarean due to the amount of scar tissue on my abdomen. In the end, my baby was breach and four weeks before my due date I was running out of amniotic fluid so these two issues forced a decision for an elective caesarean - I suspect my obstetrician was relieved that I'm not the earth mother type who would ever fight for a natural delivery!

There were three other issues during this pregnancy. Firstly, I had a couple of extra scans to check the baby's weight gain was satisfactory. My obstetrician thought my surgery might have affected my ability to absorb food - this was not the case, but it was great to have extra scans. Secondly, at seven months, the sheer weight of my belly (and given my fairly weak stomach muscles) caused the development of a small hernia. Apart from being a little lopsided, it really didn't cause any problems. Finally, my stoma increased in size but this really wasn't a huge inconvenience.

Our gorgeous daughter, Alexandria, was born in July 2002 and although my husband and I are in a semi-permanent state of exhaustion – she is a joy and we are so very grateful for her.

My obstetrician advised us that I had a lot of scar tissue and my daughter was a little difficult to get out. He suggested we wait a couple of years before having another child in order to become as strong and fit as I could. After the birth I saw my stoma surgeon to assess the hernia - he assured me that although another pregnancy would make the hernia worse, he was confident he could satisfactorily resolve the problem with surgery in a few years once my family was complete.

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As advised we duly waited two years and I was fortunate enough to conceive quickly. All went well until 17 weeks into the pregnancy when I had the worst cough I have ever experienced and my hernia as a result increased ten-fold. I was admitted to hospital for assessment and possibly surgery to repair the hernia. This would have meant risks to the baby, however, much to everyone's relief after two days of lying flat the hernia settled down enough for me to go home. The next two months waiting for the baby to become 'viable' was an anxious time.

Throughout this second pregnancy my hernia continued to expand along with my belly, making me very lopsided and clothes shopping became more like tent shopping. The skin around the hernia became purple as the veins rose to the surface and as for the constant undulating - it was a fascinating sight - I lost count of the number of health professionals who looked at my belly and said "wow"! As I laid in the bath and baby became more active, looking down, my right hand hernia was undulating as the intestine moved just beneath the skin and my left hand side rose and fell as baby kicked and punched. Was I glad to reach the end - you bet!

I wrote this article on Saturday 7th May 2005. My son is due to be born by caesarean on Monday morning. I have requested a general anaesthetic as I hated the experience of being awake and paralysed during the last caesarean - my wish has been granted so Monday morning, I will go to sleep and hopefully, wake up next to my husband holding our son - if you are not an earth mother it has to be one of the most civilised ways of having children! The official reasons this time for the caesarean are previous abdomen surgery - previous caesarean, but mostly because no one wants me to put more pressure on the hernia by the inevitable pushing involved with natural childbirth.

The plan is for my stoma surgeon to visit me some time next week and assess the hernia and when it should be dealt with. I presume a hernia repair and maybe a re-locating of the stoma are on the cards although it seems likely the surgeon will want to wait at least for my caesarean scarring to heal so hopefully I'll have a few months at home with the baby before more surgery.

It has not been an easy journey but I do feel my life is fortunate in many ways. I tend to focus on the positive and the health problems frankly are an irritating nuisance to be resolved so I can get back to my busy life. Of course, I would rather be 'ordinary', but there is so much I have to be grateful for - how can I complain? Ultimately, all our experiences shape the person we become and the vast majority of the time, I am hugely content with my lot.

*(editor's note – since Alison wrote this article last Summer, she has given birth to Nicholas, who is now 9 months old. Towards the end of the year Alison underwent successful surgery to repair the hernia. She is pleased to report that there are no bumps at all now!)*

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