Mother sets five stone weight loss goal to raise money for charity

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A grateful mum, whose daughter underwent major heart surgery just before her second birthday, has set herself a weight loss challenge to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust, a charity that supported her family during this time.

Caroline Wilkinson, 33, from Stockton-on-Tees, and her husband, Paul, 44, were shocked to discover their daughter, Abigail, had a heart murmur at her first baby check, only a month after she was born in July 2015. Abigail was referred to North Tees Hospital in Stockton where her worried parents were sat down by the consultant and told their baby had heart conditions called atrial septal defect (ASD) and pulmonary stenosis (PS), and it was likely she would need corrective open heart surgery once she was older. She was referred on to paediatric cardiologist, Doctor Crossland, at Freeman Hospital in Newcastle, and over the next 20 months her condition was closely monitored by a specialist every 90 days. **Mum, Caroline, a Human Resources Manager, says:**

"When the specialist diagnosed Abby, they told us that ASD meant there was a hole in the wall separating the top two chambers of her heart and that oxygen-rich blood was leaking into the oxygen-poor blood. Additionally, the PS meant her pulmonary valve was too narrow, which explained why she had been so unsettled and found feeding difficult. Although we were very worried, the specialist reassured us that we needed to wait until Abby was bigger and stronger, before they could operate.

"Finally, in January 2017, after what seemed like forever, the doctor told us that Abby would have her surgery in the coming months. It was at this point that we were told about Scott House run by The Sick Children's Trust. We were told that the charity could provide us with free accommodation just a few minutes away from where Abby would be recovering from her operation.

"Abby had open heart surgery at the end of May, just before the Bank Holiday weekend. We were only minutes way the whole time, so I was able to have peace of mind when I wasn't with my daughter and needed to go to Scott House for a bit of rest. I knew there was a telephone line direct from the ward to my room and that the nurses would contact me if anything changed. On the first night of Abby stay in Intensive Care we were encourage to leave her for a couple of hours and to go and get some sleep ourselves, as we hadn't slept properly for a number of days prior to her surgery.

"We were told that Abby would still be sedated, however as she was doing well they planned to gradually reduce her sedation over the coming hours and monitor how she reacted. Abby woke very quickly from the sedation and worked herself up into a real state during the early hours of the morning and the nurses called me as she was so distressed and crying for 'mummy' – I was by her side in a few minutes and able to calm her down and get her back off to sleep.

"The flexibility and compassion from my employer meant I was able to 'work from home' at Scott House. There were amazing facilities with great Wi-Fi, a quiet room where I could set up my work station and also drink endless tea and coffee! Because although when your child is ill and your world falls apart, the rest of the world keeps moving. Whilst my employer was fantastic and supported me throughout, jobs still need to be done and I wanted to ensure I was still being productive within the business, whilst my priority was to be there for Abigail. Our five year old daughter Charlotte even came to visit and she loved the playroom and all the attention the staff gave her."

Fortunately Abigail's operation was a success and she has made a full recovery. She still has monthly checks and it is likely she will need further surgery in the future as she still has PS. **Her mum continues:**

"I had the idea to take on a weight loss challenge once Abby had recovered because I really want to raise as much money as I can for The Sick Children's Trust to say thank you for being there for us when we needed them. I plan to lose five stone by next June and raise over £1,000 if I can. My weight has always been a difficult challenge to me.

"Yes I do love chocolate, wine and all the naughty things in life and it doesn't help that I'm not a big fan of exercising! So I've committed to dropping five stone within 12 months and hope to raise awareness and money along the way. I am really motivated to reach my target as it's so important for me to be able to feel like I've done a little bit to help someone going through a similar situation to us. Especially as someone else obviously gave money, time and effort to allow us the chance to stay in Scott House."

Media:













To help her achieve her fundraising goal Caroline has joined her local Slimming World and attends meetings once a week on a Saturday morning in Eaglescliffe. **Her Slimming Consultant, Angie Taylor, who herself joined Slimming World as a member and understands the challenges of losing weight, says:**

“Caroline has set herself a great target, and she has almost reached her half way mark. The group are very supportive of each other and each week we hand round a collection pot for The Sick Children’s Trust to help Caroline with her fundraising. It is not an easy challenge, but the charity is amazing and the rewards are plentiful and I know she is already starting to feel the benefits.

“It’s one year since I launched my first Slimming World group at All Saints Church Centre in Eaglescliffe on Saturday mornings at 8.30am or 10.30am. After struggling with my weight for years I joined Slimming World almost three years ago and managed to shed over four stones in 18 months so I know how hard it can be sometimes, but with Caroline’s dedication and commitment and with our support she will achieve her target of losing five stone in 12 months.”

To support Caroline and make a donation please visit: http://www.justgiving.com/Caroline-Wilkinson8

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit: http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/

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