

Tackling *Torticollis*

Katy twin Emma Sheedy thrives after being born with a potentially dangerous twisted neck

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Photography by Nicole Prosser



Emma Sheedy suffered from torticollis, a twisted-neck condition, as a result of her twin sister Savannah resting on her in the womb

Emma Sheedy is one of the only girls on her church's flag football team, and she is known to have "quite an arm." Emma, now 8 years old, has also played soccer since the age of 4 and is arguably the best athlete in the family, according to her dad Jonathan Sheedy. Her athletic prowess, however, seemed like a distant dream to her parents during the first two years of her life after Emma was diagnosed with torticollis, a twisted-neck condition that sometimes results in developmental delays and other complications.

Pain in the Neck

Emma's twin sister, Savannah, was about a pound heavier than her, and rested on top of Emma during the 36 weeks they spent in the womb. This positioning led to a strain on Emma's neck that caused torticollis. When Emma was born, her parents noticed a slight tilt in her neck, and the doctors confirmed that it was torticollis. "The doctors kept us at ease the whole time," Jonathan says.

Both of the twins also had acid reflux and colic during the first year of their lives, but Emma had more pronounced symptoms. She was a fussy baby and had to endure physical therapy - that was often painful - for her torticollis until she was 2. The twins' older sister McKenna would sometimes ask her mom when the twins would stop crying.

The twins also required nebulizer breathing treatments every couple of hours in the early months of their lives, adding up to a very busy schedule for the Sheedys, both of whom work full time. Felicia Sheedy, remembering

this stressful time, looks to her husband and laughs. “How did we ever get through it?” she asks.

Emma’s Treatment

Emma endured a series of stretches and exercises to help bring her neck back into a normal position in addition to wearing a soft helmet to help shape her head. All of the treatments and therapies would have amounted to a hefty cost for the Sheedy family, but the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program helped buffer some of these costs. ECI, a state-funded program, helps provide treatment for families with children with disabilities or developmental delays. At first, Emma received physical therapy twice a week in the ECI program, and then incrementally less as her condition improved.

Enduring Faith

Felicia says her faith helped her and her family through this hectic period, adding that her family’s experience with torticollis serves as a good lesson for her children on enduring faith.

“God never gives you more than you can handle,” she says. “Emma will look back at pictures and see that her head was tilted. I remind her that as a baby, she had to work extra hard, but that you can overcome any obstacle with hard work and faith. We worried that she would have delayed milestones,” Felicia says, adding that Emma could ride her bicycle without training wheels by the age of 4. “She overcame all of those obstacles and is an amazing athlete now.”

Emma completed her treatment for torticollis after graduating ECI at the age of 2. Now, she and her sisters each take part in a variety of sports, such as flag football, soccer, and cheerleading, and enjoy going to church with their parents every Sunday. “We’re a normal family,” Felicia says. “We are so blessed to have our children, and we have learned to have faith no matter what the situation.” **KM**

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Twins Savannah and Emma with their parents Jonathan and Felicia, and their older sister McKenna

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– Felicia Sheedy

Fast Facts About Torticollis

- Torticollis literally means “twisted neck” in Latin
- In newborns, torticollis can happen due to positioning in the uterus or after a difficult childbirth
- Infants can acquire torticollis after birth
- Infants with torticollis have a higher risk of plagiocephaly (flat head syndrome)
- Torticollis can be present at birth or take up to three months to develop
- It is important to get a proper diagnosis and treatment plan for torticollis from physician

Source: kidshealth.org