

NATIONAL GYNAECOLOGICAL AWARENESS DAY September 10

A PAP SMEAR saved my life

Karen was trying for a baby but instead got a call no woman ever wants to take

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It was the day before my holiday and I was busy packing - and having a Pap smear. 'You're organised!' my doctor said. 'I received a reminder in the mail,' I said. 'And I wanted to be up-to-date with this.'

The following day my husband Chris, 34, and I flew to Broome. We'd only been married a year and had just started trying for a baby.

Pap smears were the furthest thing from my mind until I switched on my mobile phone and heard a message from the surgery. 'They want me to book another appointment,' I told Chris. 'It's probably some abnormal cells. I think that's quite common.'

Back home, I went to see my GP, who confirmed that I had abnormal cells. 'We need to test for cervical cancer,' she

said, and told me I needed laser treatment to remove the cells.

I was stunned. I was 32, healthy and didn't have a family history of cervical cancer.

I saw a gynaecologist, who did a colposcopy - a tiny camera was inserted into my cervix to examine the abnormal cells.

Two weeks later I was at work when the phone rang.

'I'm sorry to tell you,' the gynaecologist said, 'but it's the early stages of cervical cancer.'

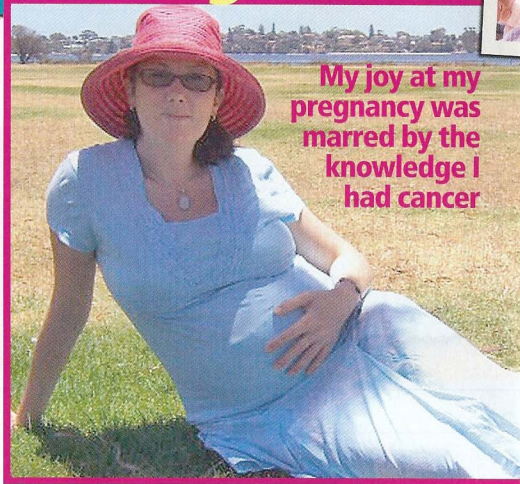
I was a blubbering mess.

That night Chris and I just hugged one another. 'What's more, I still haven't had my period!' I sobbed.

I was a week overdue, but I knew stress and the colposcopy could have delayed my cycle.

The next day, Chris and I saw another specialist. 'You'll need a CT scan and a cone biopsy,' he said, explaining that this involved keyhole surgery through my bellybutton to remove the cancer cells and surrounding tissue.

'There's a chance I could



My joy at my pregnancy was marred by the knowledge I had cancer

be pregnant,' I blurted out. 'That could complicate things. If you are pregnant, you won't be able to have a CT scan. And the general anaesthetic you'll need to have for the cone biopsy

could be a risk for the baby.' The next day, the clinic called. 'You're pregnant,' the woman said. 'My joy was marred by the knowledge I had cancer. I was told to have a cone biopsy as soon as possible.

symptoms of infection and in most cases the body's immune system fights the infection and it clears by itself. But when the HPV infection is ongoing or recurs over time it has the potential to cause cervical cancer. There are more than 100 different types of HPV but only certain strains cause cervical cancer.

The HPV vaccine Known as Gardasil, the vaccine protects against four major strains of HPV and gives 75 per cent protection

against cervical cancer. HPV is a sexually transmitted virus so it is recommended that girls be given the vaccine before they become sexually active. It does not protect women who have already been infected. Gardasil is the world's first anti-cancer vaccine. It was developed by 2006 Australian of the Year, Professor Ian Frazer. For more information, contact the Cancer Council of Australia or GAIN (Gynaecological Awareness Information Network) at www.gynsupport.com.



My cancer was treated and Hannah was born healthy

I didn't even ask about the risk to my baby - I didn't want to know. I had an ultrasound to measure the eight-week-old foetus. As my baby appeared on the screen, a huge lump formed in my throat. 'Stay strong,' I whispered.

The next day I had the operation and, when I came to, my gynaecologist was standing beside me. 'It went very well,' he said. 'We got it all.'

Again, I couldn't bring myself to ask about the baby. But the next morning I woke feeling queasy and dizzy. 'It's morning sickness,' the doctor said. 'That's a sign your baby is strong.'

The next few weeks crawled by. Finally, at four months, I had another ultrasound.

'I'm pleased to say your baby is fine,' my doctor said.

Two days later my friend Tanya threw a party and I announced I was expecting a baby. At last I was able to enjoy my pregnancy!

At 38 weeks, Hannah was born by caesarean. She had a mop of black hair, big blue eyes and a healthy cry!

Six months have passed since her birth and I've been cleared of cancer. Some day I hope to have another child and, if it's also a girl, I'll make sure she and Hannah get the HPV vaccine that will protect them from cervical cancer.

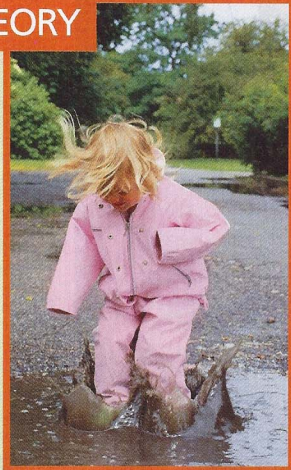
As for us older females, I urge you all to keep up-to-date with Pap smears. It's a few minutes of embarrassment that could save your life. ■

GERM THEORY

Put away the disinfectant and household cleansers. Scientists now believe that snotty-nosed, dirty-faced kids may actually be healthier!

A landmark UK study found children exposed to germs in early life were better protected against infections that might cause cancer later on.

Children from wealthier areas appear to be more vulnerable to disease than those growing up poor. A crowded and dirty environment could actually boost your child's immune system.



Every eight minutes, someone is admitted to an Australian hospital with a broken bone due to poor bone health.

BIG FISH Children of women who take fish oil during pregnancy may have improved co-ordination and language skills. They score higher in all measures of development. But before you dose up, check with your doctor.



GOOD MEMORY

Here's new hope for people battling the bottle. Canadian researchers have found that implanting false memories of a bad experience with alcohol prevents alcohol abuse later in life. Manipulating memory could also be used to prevent over-eating.

But previous bad experiences don't appear to turn off people from all foods and drinks - only those that have a distinct or unusual flavour. Although it works with strawberry ice cream, when it came to potato chips, the majority of people tested asked for more!



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Kids and sleep

My kids stay up late and then won't get up in the morning - especially after the holidays. What can I do?

Primary school kids need about 10-12 hours sleep, and teens need eight to nine. Many fall far short of this and suffer chronic sleep deprivation, which has an impact on their learning ability and health.

Try to improve sleep routines gradually, before the holidays end. Aim for a regular bedtime and wake-up time, seven days a week. Once sleep improves, the weekends can be more flexible, but don't let them become sleep catch-up time.

Start a bedtime routine of quiet activities and a warm drink. Computers, TV, video games and caffeinated drinks should be avoided. Try to be a good role model by keeping regular hours yourself.

Copper IUDs

Are there any risks with using a copper IUD as a regular contraceptive?

There's no evidence of IUDs causing cancer. Copper wire on an IUD kills sperm and causes changes in the womb lining so an egg can't grow if fertilised, making the device more effective.

A tiny amount of copper is absorbed by the body and is just detectable on a blood test. Most of it dissolves into the vaginal fluid and is lost outside the body. You should not use one if you are allergic to copper or have Wilson's disease, a rare genetic disorder that prevents the body getting rid of copper.

FACTS ON CERVICAL CANCER

Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer worldwide in women aged 15 and over. It is also one of the most preventable and curable of all cancers. Each year, about 30,000 Australian women have abnormal Pap smear results. About 750 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. Approximately 240 of them will die from the disease.

A Pap smear every two years is the best protection against cervical cancer. All women who have ever had sex need to have regular Pap smears, including those

What is HPV? Cervical cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is a common sexually transmitted virus. Generally, there are no

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