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Paralysed Waist Down, How I Found The Strength To Carry My Pregnancy To Full Term

By Krystelle Dsouza

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Hyderabad resident Poojitha Reddy, who was diagnosed with spina bifida at the age of 21 days, recalls how she handled her pregnancy alongside her condition.



Poojitha Reddy recalls that she and her husband were both ecstatic and scared when they found out she was pregnant in June last year. Any mother-to-be would relate to these conflicting emotions, but in the case of the 29-year-old software developer from Hyderabad, the fear was not without reason.

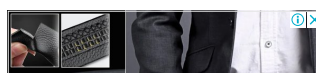


Diagnosed with spina bifida — a [birth defect](#) wherein the spinal cord fails to develop properly — at 21 days after birth, Poojitha was paralysed from the waist down. On finding out she was going to have a baby, a new fear plagued her mind.

"What if I would pass on my defect to my unborn child?"

Alongside was the worry of how she would accommodate another human being in her womb, when she herself faced so many challenges with walking and sitting due to her condition.

As she tells **The Better India**, "My mind was a maze of questions — Would I still be able to wear my leg braces? Which hospital should I go to? Would my baby be in discomfort because of my low activity? How would my positions affect my baby? What added care would I have to take?"



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Poojitha and her husband decided to take these questions to the gynaecologist at the [two-week scan](#). On understanding the couple's condition, the doctor recommended they go to a multispeciality hospital, where she would be able to access better treatment. "This is when my husband's friend told him about the Fernandez Foundation, a not-for-profit healthcare organisation committed to caring for women and children," she says.

The couple started treatment with Dr Anisha Gala, a consultant obstetrician at Fernandez Foundation, in August 2021.

'To say it was a tough nine months, would be an understatement.'

Dr Anisha explains, "Spina bifida is a congenital condition where there's a defect in the neural tube. This tube is a structure found in a developing embryo. It is responsible for forming the brain, spinal cord, etc. In spina bifida, the closure of the neural tube and the spinal bones is incomplete."



She adds, "Depending on the severity of the condition or other accompanying abnormalities, an individual with this problem may either not have any symptoms, be completely paralysed, or may not even survive after birth."

So when Poojitha expressed her concerns about [passing the defect to her baby](#), Dr Anisha assured her that this shouldn't be a problem. The condition could be detected by ultrasound before birth.

However, the month it would show up in would depend upon the severity of the condition.

"Severe forms may be detected at the third month, while others may be detected in the fifth month or in subsequent ultrasounds," says Dr Anisha, adding that late detection is sometimes also possible and occurs when the lesions are minor.



With all this information, Poojitha was now prepared to take on the challenge of pregnancy with no fear. Along with the usual follow-ups with the gynaecologist, she also started genetic assessments and physiotherapy.

"I was advised to do stretching exercises to ease my back and body pains during each stage and followed the exercise regime diligently every day," she says. She also started spirometry to improve her lung capacity and had a diet tailored to ensure she did not put on excess weight.

"The doctors said that would have only added to the pregnancy discomfort," she says. As the months progressed, Poojitha remained resilient, but [the third trimester tested her patience](#).



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Poojitha Reddy

"I use leg callipers to walk, since I am paralysed waist down. It was a struggle to manage the braces and support the growing belly," she says. "There were so many moments when I broke down."

She recounts how she wasn't even able to sit or sleep at times. "As evening came each day, I would feel bloated to extreme degrees and the nights brought with them their own share of difficulties."

She says that sometimes, she would lie awake for hours, finally falling asleep on the chair.

'But through the toughest of days, I had unparalleled support.'

When she couldn't sleep or would feel at her worst, Poojitha's parents and husband were her pillars of strength. "They'd often tell me that it wasn't my condition that was causing me agony, that pregnancy by itself is a challenge and I was doing great... especially when I would feel like the spina bifida was the sole reason for all of this."

But when asked if she ever felt like giving up, she says, "No. That thought never crossed my mind. I was certain I was going to give this baby the best life."

However at night, she would often [battle anxious thoughts](#) about life after delivery. "I was worried if I would be able to support my weight post pregnancy or if things would go back to normal or get worse. I was scared about how pregnancy would affect my spina bifida."

Through all these nightmarish thoughts, the only cure was when she felt her baby move. "All the discomfort would subside when I felt the little being's movements inside me."

The moment of truth

One day in her 36th week of pregnancy, Dr Anisha told Poojitha that the time had arrived for them to do a C section. She assured Poojitha, who was worried about the baby's weight, that it was the right time.

Dr Anisha says a C section seemed the wisest option since Poojitha's birth canal was narrow. "The anaesthesia and critical care team were aware of her condition and this enabled them to plan for anaesthesia for the procedure."

On 23 February 2022, Poojitha delivered a healthy baby boy. "The moment I held him, I was the happiest in the whole world," she says.

Dr Anisha, too, commends her spirit. "All throughout her pregnancy, I was impressed by Poojitha's positive mindset, determination to carry the pregnancy till term, and the immense support she received from her family members."

Today, Poojitha’s baby is five months old, and she says her happiness only doubles seeing him grow each day.

“Even as every day is a challenge, it is no longer impossible to navigate.” She also says the physiotherapy helped her spring back soon and her worries of the pregnancy affecting her condition did not come to pass. Life is going back to normal.



Poojitha with her husband and baby

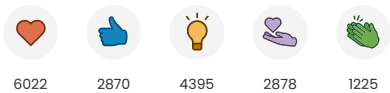
Today, she says as she watches her baby do the simplest things, like try to hold on to her finger, or give a shy smile when she plays with him, she feels immensely rewarded. “The journey was beautiful, albeit a roller coaster. But the roller coaster ended up giving me a bundle of joy.”

She says the fears she had before her baby was born — of how she would pull through the pregnancy — are now reasons why she is proud she never gave up. She would like for her story to be an example for all expectant mothers, regardless of complications.

“Trust your body. And even more important, trust the little human growing inside you. The child automatically adapts to your body. If you are strong, happy and enjoy your trimesters, you will see how this joy is reflected in the child you deliver,” she notes.

“The nine months may seem a struggle, but as soon as you hold the baby in your arms, you will know it was worth it, and forget the ordeal.”

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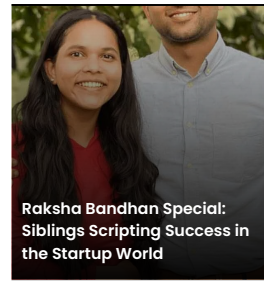
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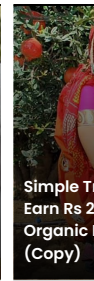
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