

We first noticed things changing with Ashleigh-Louise back at the beginning of March 08, when she was 6, there was a bout of 'slapped cheek' (fifth disease) going around school, the teacher said to me at the end of one day, "we think Ashleigh has 'slap cheek' some of the mums have been ringing in to say their kids have it and she has the symptoms".

So I ring the Dr's get an appointment and off we go, Yes the Dr diagnosed slap cheek, said "keep her off a day until she feels better, its just a virus, only harmful to pregnant ladies , so don't worry" Everyday when I was taking Matty to school, all the other kids that had it were better and back in school a day later, after 4 days, Ash still wasn't eating properly, very lethargic and generally miserable , but the rash had cleared and the temperature had gone. so after a week we sent her back in.

The first two days back she wet herself in school (hadn't done this since being 2), and they said she wasn't her self, and seeing as there were so many virus' going around could I keep her off until she was better, I called into the Dr's and asked them for advice they said its just viral, some kids take longer to get over than others, she's not infectious when you think she is ready send her back. I was made to feel like a silly overprotective mother, was had wasted an valuable appointment slot.

She didn't want to go to her ballet classes or her jazz modern, tap either, she would moan all the way there and cry about going in, then the teacher would say she'd seemed tired, most of the class had had 'slap cheek' and so it was assumed she'd picked it up again. to be honest two of her friends had given up dance, we just thought she was doing it because of that. Looking back I cant believe we forced her to go to class for 3 weeks, even though she was virtually hysterical about not wanting to go and being too tired to be bothered, I will be haunted by that for the rest of my life.

she changed so much over the next 4 weeks or so, she became withdrawn and moody, too tired to ever do anything, never wanted to go out, and still didn't get her appetite back, she drank constantly (something we had always had to try and encourage her to do in the past), she started being very clingy and went from being a very independent strong minded little girl, to very babyish again, and even the school were concerned because she is on the gifted and talented list and is normally a very logical and thoughtful child, the last few days she was in school in May were awful, her attitude was terrible, she was arguing and fighting with her best friends and not interested in anything, didn't want to do PE or any exercise, she was sent home from school on the Thursday 15th May because she was falling asleep during class and had wet herself again, she went to bed Thurs night and when we went into her room to check before we went to bed, there was a pool of water running across her wood floor (she has a cabin bed, so when she has wet, it had leaked right through the mattress and down under the bed) this happened Thurs and Fri night, Then she started vomiting , she kept nothing down all weekend, by Sunday she would only drink ice cold water out of the fridge. on Saturday she was very rowdy but still tired, so we put the Wii fit on, it would not let her play stating that it wasn't the same person because of the weight difference from 10 days ago (7lb!!!)

Sunday night she woke and vomited at 3am, then was screaming saying every part of her body was hurting and stinging, again I will never forgive myself for not jumping in the car and going straight to A&E, but after nights of disturbed sleep and being so tired, I for some god unknown reason decided to dose her with calpol and sat up on the couch for an hour and a half with her until she fell asleep, telling myself I'd take her in the morning, once I got the boys to school, I was worried because the boys both had exams and I didn't want them to miss any! when she woke at 7 am she seemed a bit better, still wouldn't eat, but I decided to just go the Dr's instead of hospital. Again where my logic had gone I don't know, I think I didn't want to be made to feel like an overprotective worry wart again.

The Dr's gave me a 10.30 appointment, by 10 am she was slowly deteriorating again, she looked grey and she would huddle on the bottom of the stairs and say she couldn't walk upstairs to go to the toilet, she had lost so much weight she would cry when you picked her up, because she was so bony. Again how I didn't see this at the time I will never know. but on Monday 19th May 08, I knew this was serious, and although I didn't know what it was for definite, there was another child in the street with scarlet fever and I thought that maybe it was that, her skin on her hands and around her mouth was peeling, so I knew she was dehydrated and was starting to become very concerned.

At the doctors, I explained about the change in behaviour, vomiting, wetting, excessive drinking, lack of energy, weight loss and said 'obviously you can see she is dehydrated her skin is peeling and she has these little lumps all over her arms and legs'

"that's a bit of dry skin on her mouth" said the doctor "and its just fatty lumps on her arms", She said "there is nothing wrong with her, you were told a few weeks ago she has a virus, its just taking a bit longer to clear up that's all" I was nearly in tears, saying 'what about the vomiting and weight loss, how much longer can that go on?' I said 'school have told me not to bring her back in til she's better'

to which she replied " well ,you send her right back in there tomorrow and tell them there's nothing wrong with her ok"

I decided as soon as I picked the boys up I would come back and see a different doctor, By this time I was convinced she had scarlet fever and was thinking she was needing an antibiotic.

because I was getting very upset, she said " I tell you what I'll get her an appointment to see the hospital if your so concerned over her weight" and we were sent on our way, As we are leaving Ash is crying that she's wetting herself, so the Dr says " oh well if your taking her the loo, do a sample for me, they'll only ask at the hospital if ones been done" so we did, I ring my husband and tell him I'm going to take her back to a different doctor that afternoon.

We get home (5 mins) and my answer machine is flashing, as we take our coats off my mobile starts ringing, its the doctor telling me her sample had shown up ++++glucose and that the A&E are expecting us, can we get straight down there its very important.

Ash tells me she is hungry (first time in weeks) so I grab some lunchables and we set off, I ring my hubby who says "Oh my god, they think she's diabetic" he agrees to meet me at the hospital asap, on the way she eats 3 crackers and a piece of ham, then starts choking, I thought she was going to throw up, then I realised she's not being sick, she cant breathe properly, her chest was convulsing, I am in a state of panic , do I stop and ask for help or carry on the 10 min journey to the hospital, I drive as fast as I can, praying I see a cop car, (never when you want one eh) manage to find the last parking space on site (furthest space from the A&E) and run with her over my shoulder, when we get there they are expecting us, she gets weighed and can barely stand, she vomits everywhere and they do a blood test, next thing she's whisked into the side room, hooked up to drips , IV's heart monitors and oxygen, They really struggled to get the IV's in , they didn't have time for anaesthetic, so did them 'live' and it was horrendous, she has awful veins just like me, they tried four diff sites before they got two that worked, she is so out of it, she isn't even really registering it. I am too scared to even cry, all that goes through my head is this is my fault, I knew something was wrong but I didn't insist the Dr do something.

Hubby arrives, I swear, I will never forget his face when he walked in and found her barely conscious, hooked up to a heart monitor, he was so angry and hurt, "why" he kept saying, they explained that she was 70% dehydrated and needed vast amounts of fluids that flooding her body so much meant a risk to the brain and heart, they had to check etc etc, that they couldn't even give her insulin yet because she was so ill, they told us she was literally minutes away from slipping into a coma, that her body was shutting down and basically eating itself, to keep her alive (ketoacidosis) I'm sure they told us more , but there was so much to take it , some of it didn't register, I'm on the phone to family, to make arrangements for the boys etc, I get back, they tell me she is improving but only slightly, so they are moving her to the High Dependency Unit so she can have one to one care, I am floored, and cant believe its happening.

She spends the next 36 hours in HDU, while we sit in shock, crying and I am screaming 'that its my fault because I didn't see it'

The nurse tells me "if its anyone's fault its your doctors, they missed some very obvious signs and weeks ago, when it wouldn't have got to such a dangerous stage either", I am livid, but just glad that she is alive , I put off going down their and wringing their necks. They said they were 98% certain that her pancreas shut down after the bad attack of slap cheek she had suffered and that's when I realised, all the way back to march when she wouldn't go to dance, didn't want to go to school and was tired and whingy and clingy all the time, she was already suffering, I now know I am the worlds worst mum ever!

She starts to come round, they remove the oxygen and heart monitor, satisfied there's no permanent damage, she is shouting for water, but cant have any, she is allowed to suck on ice cubes, her little face lights up when she's given them. they put in an insulin lv and start the process of showing her

the pen she will use for her insulin, she is so confused and angry and cries so much, it destroys you.

After another day, they allow her to remove her Iv, so she can get up and play and use the loo, they promise her if she lets mum or dad do her needles instead, she can remove the canula's, by now all her sites are so swollen and they are starting to run out of places for new ones she agrees, once she's up and about, she starts to improve rapidly, she is eating like a horse and is brilliant about letting us inject her (I am struggling with this , as I am needle phobic) but she is brilliant.

after a week they allow us to come, loaded down with needles, pens, insulin, sharps bins and literature, we venture out into a world we haven't seen for ages and wow, how different it is now, we began the long hard journey into living with diabetes , its been 5 months next Monday , it feels like a lifetime, we have lost our beautiful, clever, placid, life loving little girl and she's been replaced with a beautiful but aggressive, angry, hurt child, and we don't know if we will ever get the other one back.

The one thing I will remember most about this year, is realising that a mothers instinct is ALWAYS right, never ever doubt yourself, I won't ever, because it nearly cost my child her life.

the one thing that I has angered me most since I've met other families with Diabetes, is how so many cases go undiagnosed until the child is very ill, its atrocious that such a life threatening condition, can be overlooked by so many GP's , it really needs more awareness raising, so we can stop it happening to more kids.