

Kimberley, 45

Wife & mother of two who was diagnosed with pregnancy-related osteoporosis following the birth of her second child, *BRISBANE*

Avid photographer and social media content creator, Kimberley, 45, Brisbane, was only 31 years of age when she was diagnosed with pregnancy-related osteoporosis – a rare condition during which a woman's bones break easily during pregnancy, or in the weeks post-birth.¹

Three months after giving birth to her second child, Kimberley woke up one morning with excruciating back pain. Over the ensuing four months, she tried to maintain her daily life as best she could, despite contending with serious pain. During this period, she visited two doctors, both of whom attributed her pain to muscle pain associated with giving birth.

Eventually Kimberley's pain grew so unbearable, that she was referred to hospital emergency, where one of the doctors noticed a curve in her back, and ordered her to undergo an X-ray, which revealed multiple crush fractures in her spine. Further examinations, including a CT scan, MRI, and bone mineral density (BMD) test also confirmed Kimberley had pregnancy-related osteoporosis.

Today, Kimberley takes medication to help balance her hormones, she exercises regularly, undergoes routine tests to check her calcium and vitamin D levels, and takes supplements when required.

She is sharing her story today to help address this less common type of osteoporosis which has a large impact on younger women affected, and is often misdiagnosed. Given her personal experience of bone fractures, Kimberley now encourages women of all ages to take their bone health seriously.

This is Kimberley's story.

When Kimberley was diagnosed with pregnancy-related osteoporosis at only 31 years of age, she was shocked, given she then had no known family history of bone disease, or any other risk factor for osteoporosis.

"Like many other Australians, I mistakenly thought osteoporosis was a disease of older people," said Kimberley.

Kimberley's son, Aidan, was only two years of age at the time, while her daughter, Addison, was only 12 weeks old when she first developed excruciating back pain. Her pain was so severe, that she was unable to hold her newborn.

Following her diagnosis with pregnancy-related osteoporosis, Kimberley was fearful of sustaining further fractures when doing simple tasks, such as bathing her children, or changing their nappies.



"My fear of sustaining further fractures continued, even as my children grew older and moved onto more strenuous activities, such as riding their bikes and scooters. It was heartbreaking to be unable to participate in these activities as a family, but I was constantly worried that should I fall, I would re-fracture," Kimberley said.

Kimberley has been unable to participate in many family activities due to the pain associated with her spinal fractures. The associated height loss and change to her posture have also impacted her mentally and physically. Kimberley maintains an earlier diagnosis of pregnancy-related osteoporosis could have prevented much of the pain she has been forced to endure, as well as the number and severity of her fractures.

"It is possible that my fractures could have occurred at different times, starting from an initial onset of pain. An earlier diagnosis could have prevented much of my suffering, or my spine from fracturing to such an extent.

"Accurate and early diagnosis is imperative. My life could have been so different, had I received an accurate diagnosis when first presenting to a medical professional," Kimberley said.

After her diagnosis, Kimberley frequently visited the Healthy Bones Australia website for information on managing osteoporosis, including treatment, supplements, diet, and exercise.

Today, Kimberley is passionate about sharing her story, which she does by assisting Healthy Bones Australia, and via her personal Instagram account, which now has more than 24,000 followers. She is also a member of a Facebook support group for women living with pregnancy-related osteoporosis.

"I hope that by sharing my story, I can help even just one person obtain an earlier diagnosis, so that they too, don't have to suffer as I have," said Kimberley.

According to Kimberley, there is a common misconception that osteoporosis only affects older Australians.

"When people hear the term 'osteoporosis', they mistakenly assume it is an older person's disease. I'm proof that this is certainly not the case.

"What are we without healthy bones? We need to protect our bones and focus on prevention," Kimberley said.

"I encourage all Australians to take a genuine interest in their bone health, by jumping onto the Healthy Bones Australia website and taking the 'Know Your Bones' online self-assessment today, to understand their risk of developing osteoporosis and how to best protect their bones at www.knowyourbones.org.au," said Kimberley.

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Reference

1. Australia HB. Pregnancy and Bone Health, Healthy Bones Australia 2021 [Available from: <https://healthybonesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/HBA-Fact-Sheet-Pregnancy.pdf>].