

living with sickle-cell anaemia

With help from Neways Margaret Mundle refuses to let this hereditary disorder stop her enjoying life to the full

Margaret Mundle was 12 years old when she was first diagnosed with sickle-cell anaemia and for over 25 years has suffered an extreme form of the disease.

My first conversation with Margaret was earlier this year. Although I had heard of sickle-cell anaemia, I was ignorant of the symptoms and suffering experienced by those diagnosed with the disease. I asked Margaret to describe what it felt like – she summed it up like this. "You know that feeling when you bump your elbow and hit your funny bone? Well that's the feeling but 100 times worse, from head to toe". As if that is not bad enough, she went on to list the other symptoms of sickle-cell: chronic anaemia; eye problems; leg ulcers; kidney and liver problems; strokes; swollen abdomen and limbs; gallstones; tiredness; hip and shoulder problems. sickle-cell anaemia is a condition caused by

chemical change in the iron protein (haemoglobin) in the blood, which forms sickle haemoglobin, which instead of being round and flexible like normal haemoglobin become half moon or sickle shaped when they lose oxygen to the tissues. These sickle-cells do not flow easily through the small blood vessels and this usually results in blockages or sickling. Sickling causes pain in different parts of the body, resulting in a painful episode called a crisis and can lead to organ damage and premature death. The symptoms associated with sickle-cell, as Margaret had informed me, are numerous with varying degrees of severity. Margaret was an extreme case and had tried everything from her mother's homemade remedies from Jamaica, to prayer and positive thinking as well as the conventional treatment on offer, but these only offered temporary control of her condition.

Her faith and strength of character kept her going, maintaining the self-belief that there was an answer out there – a way to ease her pain.

Margaret had received a tape and put it on a shelf along with the junk mail she had been sent. It lay there for about six months, until one day she listened to it – that day changed her life forever – she has never looked back.

Much to her family's horror, not to mention against the will of her team of specialists, Margaret decided to turn

her back on the conventional drugs and their side effects, and to try **Maximol**. It took a year for her body to stabilise – she truly believes that the expectation of another crisis held back her progress, but eventually the mental side had to accept the physical.



Baby BruNieahn

Margaret cannot say she is cured, however instead of hospitalisation three to four times a year for a major crisis, for up to three weeks, followed by two weeks recuperation at home, she has had one major crisis in three years! In her own words she says, "that is a vast improvement". Margaret took a chance, made the decision to take **Maximol** and become her own guinea pig, to control her sickle-cell after becoming disillusioned with conventional treatment.

At the age of 42, Margaret became pregnant with her fourth child. During her other three pregnancies she needed up to four units of blood per month. On 26 September 2002, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy named BruNieahn, without having one single unit of blood during the whole nine months and none during the birth. In fact, as a result of her unusually healthy pregnancy, the team of specialists that have followed her case from childhood now call her the Miracle Lady.

Margaret's mother who, over the years, has seen her suffer so much, is amazed at her daughter's good health and remains by her side offering the love and support that helped her through the dark days. It is in her father's memory and in tribute to her mother's strength of character that she has named her project the TFM Health Foundation.

This remarkable lady, Margaret Mundle, is a pioneer and has made an exciting discovery. As well as looking after her new baby, she continues her research into helping sickle-cell anaemia sufferers along with the Brent African and Caribbean Disabled Peoples' Association and the TFM Health Foundation. Despite these huge commitments, Margaret is currently studying on three degree courses; including Clinical Nutrition, to help her become an authority on every aspect of her condition.