

Dreadful morning sickness cost me my role in Les Mis

Like the Duchess of Cambridge, award-winning stage and screen actress Frances Ruffelle suffered hyperemesis gravidarum, acute morning sickness. Currently starring in Les Miserables, the 47-year-old mum of three, including pop star Eliza Doolittle, explains how she got through her pregnancies.



EXPECTING: Kate

In *Les Miserables* I play a prostitute - alongside Anne Hathaway. Being in the film brought back a lot of memories of my time in New York and being pregnant with Eliza. I was 21 and playing Eponine on Broadway in *Les Mis*. As I'd grown up eating healthily and exercising, I wrongly thought I'd sail through my pregnancy.

It quickly became obvious that wasn't going to happen. I was constantly nauseous and lost count of how often I was vomiting. I drank water and ate bread but it wouldn't stay down. I couldn't even brush my teeth! Every time I tried, I'd throw up. I was so sick I didn't even make it to my surprise birthday party that the producers had organised.

I remember thinking, 'This isn't what it says in all the pregnancy books', and I became so ill I had to keep going into hospital and being drip-fed. Eventually, I had to leave the play and return to London, where in the end I spent five months in bed before Eliza was eventually born.

I also remember being on a drip in the Cedars-Sinai Hospital in LA, four months pregnant with Eliza, and being invited to appear on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.

One minute I was on a drip then within an hour I was rehearsing at the NBC studios, throwing up in the toilet in the dressing room just before going on. It was just horrendous. Doctors tried giving me raspberry leaf tea, flat Diet Coke too, but nothing worked. I even tried having some acupuncture.

Some people say that women can be allergic to pregnancy and perhaps my hormones were just too strong for my body, but one positive was that doctors told me that I shouldn't worry too much about the

baby's health because your baby will take everything from you.

You will suffer but the baby is more likely to be stronger because they've got strong hormones holding them in place. Eliza was born very quickly and painlessly and she's a healthy adult as are my two boys Nat and Felix.

And despite the misery of that first pregnancy, once you see the end result - a beautiful baby - all the nausea is worth it.

I've been reading about Kate Middleton's pregnancy and all I would say to her is that it doesn't necessarily get better with subsequent pregnancies. I was in bed for five months with Eliza, slightly longer with Nat, who is now 23, and for Felix, who is 17 now, it was the entire nine months.

I was literally in bed the whole time and if I tried to go downstairs to the kitchen to make myself some burnt toast and tea, which is all I could face, I had to sit on the floor and get my breath back before I could even stand up to put the toast on.

Starving hungry, I went down to 6st but I tried hard not to go into hospital because it's so boring just lying there. If I needed a drip, I begged the doctors to let me go home, but then I'd have to come back when the symptoms returned.

It was a nightmare but at least I knew there would be an end to it and my symptoms vanished the second Felix was born.

One lesson I did learn by my third pregnancy was that chewing gum helped me to cope so that's my little tip to Kate -

Chewing gum helped me to cope so that's my tip to Kate



CLOSE: With daughter Eliza



ACTRESS: Frances is back in *Les Mis*



PREGNANT: As Eponine on Broadway

chew gum, because when you're chewing gum or sucking sweets you're not feeling nauseous because you're swallowing your own saliva. It doesn't sound too healthy but it worked for me.

It would be lovely if they could come up with some way of stopping women feeling like this because a lot of women also have other kids to take care of or work to do. I was lucky enough to have help but others aren't so lucky.

I've talked to my mum Sylvia Young - owner of the theatre school - and my younger sister Alison about hyperemesis gravidarum, and their pregnancies have been amazing, so it's not a genetic thing, unless it's from my dad. I don't think my experience will put Eliza off becoming

pregnant. Right now she's young and working on her career.

Since my pregnancies, my health's been absolutely fine. I'm just as energetic as I used to be and I actually run more than when I was younger. I still wear the same size clothes I wore when I was 20, although my body feels aches and pains more.

I'll be 50 in three years' time but I think worrying about ageing is the worst thing you can do. I'm just hoping to live a full life as long as I can and stay fit.

As told to Nick McGrath

● FRANCES RUFFELLE PLAYS THE TITLE ROLE IN PIAF AT THE CURVE THEATRE, LEICESTER FROM FEB 22 TO MARCH 16.

WHAT IS HYPEREMESIS GRAVIDARUM?

Dr Daghni Rajasingam from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, explains:

"Hyperemesis gravidarum is severe morning sickness and is a fairly common condition during early pregnancy.

HG is caused by the beta HCG levels (human chorionic gonadotropin - aka the hormone that the body produces during pregnancy) in the body and the woman's sensitivity to it. It varies from woman to woman as some are more sensitive to it than others. The bHCG levels are elevated in the first trimester, which is when hyperemesis gravidarum is more commonly encountered, and decline thereafter, although for

some women it may carry on into the second trimester for the same reason - this is very rare.

Symptoms can include persistent vomiting, dehydration, tiredness and dizziness. When these symptoms are severe, admission to hospital may be needed for observation and to treat dehydration with intravenous fluids, however, this usually only means a few days in hospital.

The best advice for anyone suffering from HG is to get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluid. The condition usually subsides by week 12 and with early diagnosis and treatment, there is no reason why you shouldn't go on to have a healthy pregnancy."