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# Little Mayla's big fight



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LOOKING at energetic, active and independent toddler Mayla Murtagh you would not guess she was born premature, weighing just 990g and spent the first four months of her life in hospital.

Mildura mum Nicole Murtagh had a completely normal pregnancy until the 27 week mark when she had a placental abruption while at work, which resulted in her delivering three months early.

"It was pretty scary, within an hour of getting to the (Mildura Base) hospital we were told they had to deliver Mayla and possibly do a hysterectomy given some of the blood damage going on, but the whole team on the day was unbelievable," she said.

"They called in the NETs (Newborn and paediatric Emergency Transport Service) team from the Royal Children's Hospital and I actually began to deliver just as they landed in Mildura.

"I managed to get a quick glimpse of Mayla while I was in recovery before she was whisked away to Melbourne that night."

The following day Nicole and her husband Dean flew to Melbourne's Mercy Hospital, which specialises in caring for premature babies.

And that is where they stayed for the next three months, with baby Mayla spending the first eight weeks of her life in a humidicrib.

"There were 70 babies in that facility... you have no concept of it until you go through it, about how many other families are going through the exact same thing as you in varying degrees of prematurity.

"But Mayla certainly fared very well, she had no ongoing health

concerns, we've honestly been very lucky considering how early she was.

"We've had to do a bit of physio but that was because she was stretched out for three months

more than she should have been, rather than being curled up in the womb."

Despite how tough those first few months were, the couple said they did not think of it as a negative experience.

"We've been reflecting more in the last six months instead of the first 12 months when we were sort of in survival mode," Nicole said.

"We definitely don't look back on it and think 'why us' ... we're very lucky to have her, because there was no way of knowing what the outcome would be.

"We sort of think 'well, it only happened to us because we were able to deal with it', there are plenty of other people out there who are less fortunate in terms of finances, family, location, which would make it a lot harder," Dean added.

The positive couple said they were able to spend three months "bonus time" getting to know their new baby daughter, but did acknowledge it was not how they expected to be introduced to parenthood.

"You don't even think 'well, that won't happen to me' because it's not even on the radar at all," Nicole said.

"The hardest day for me was when I was on the ward at the Mercy (in Melbourne), I'd spent about a week there recovering and they brought a mother in next to me with a baby.

"Just hearing this mother kiss and breastfeed her child was hard.

"But we've got a really strong relationship and our family were really supportive. Mum and Dad came up pretty much every weekend to spend time with us and give us some normalcy and we both had good workplaces that

supported us."

After three months at the Mercy Mayla was able to return to Mildura where she spent another month at Mildura Base Hospital before she was able to go home.

"It's been relatively smooth sailing since then, we've spent a few months in lock down because we certainly have to be careful of germs and a few vulnerabilities. That's still one of the biggest worries we have because her immune system is a bit deficient," Nicole said.

While now at 17 months old she looks a lot younger than a typical toddler due to her small stature, she is on the fast track to hitting her milestones and catching up, which typically occurs around two years.

Nicole and Dean will head to Melbourne this month for Walk for Prems 2018.



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Local family Nicole and Dean Murtagh, with their daughter Mayla, 17 months, will take part in Walk for Prens in Melbourne in support of the 48,000 premature or sick babies born in Australia every year.

Picture: Carmel Zaccone