

## We can't let Holly laugh or cry...or she might die

### **MOST parents would agree that it sounds like Mission: Impossible.**

But Tina Cleveland, 42, has been warned not to let her toddler's emotions get out of control.

*Because laughing or crying too much will make her daughter Holly's heart stop.*

Holly, two, suffers from a condition called reflex anoxic seizures (RAS). It's caused by a lack of blood from the heart to the brain.

Upset, pain, tiredness or excitement can trigger an attack meaning Holly's heart will temporarily seize and she will stop breathing for up to 20 seconds.



Joy ... Tina with newborn Holly

Before the diagnosis Tina had been told Holly was just naughty and holding her breath in a tantrum.

Now she wants to share her story to stop other parents misunderstanding what is happening if Holly has an attack in public.

Tina says: "People think she's just being stropky. They might see me saying she can't have a bag of sweets and the next minute she's slumped on the floor, not breathing.

"They think she's holding her breath in anger but really the emotion has triggered an attack that's stopped her heart."

Working together with individuals, families and medical professionals to offer support and information on Syncope and Reflex Anoxic Seizures

Unfortunately for housewife Tina and husband Ray, 50, an engineer, it's a familiar scenario that never gets any easier.

Tina says: "Holly's heart has always restarted of its own accord but that doesn't make it any less frightening.

"Imagine seeing your child not breathing. It's the worst feeling in the world."

But with no cure or treatment, all Tina and husband Ray can do is try to prevent Holly getting too tired or emotional.

Tina says: "If she gets too upset her heart will just stop and it's the same if we let her get too excited. When doctors told me not to let Holly get too excited, tired or cross I was stunned. Toddlers don't do a lot else."

The problems were first noticed when Holly was nine months old. She'd been crying but suddenly stopped and went floppy.

Tina was terrified but Holly quickly came to and they put the episode down to a temper.

Tina, *pictured inset with Ray, Holly and son Ryan*, says: "It's not uncommon for kids to hold their breath if they don't get their own way so I guessed that was what she was doing."

Tina made an appointment with her GP and explained the episode. He agreed that Holly had most likely been holding her breath in anger.



Happy days ... Tina with Ryan, Ray and Holly

Then the family noticed that whenever Holly didn't get her own way she would scream and cry, then fall silent and lose consciousness.

Tina became so concerned she visited the GP again. She says: "I was told lots of children do it and that she would grow out of it."

But in October last year, when Holly was 20 months, Tina and Ray arranged for her sister Nicola to have Holly and her brother Ryan, then eight, for an overnight visit.

They waved goodbye, but when Tina and Ray returned to their Great Yarmouth home there was an answer machine message from Nicola's stepson Alex saying something terrible had happened.

The couple had barely a chance to listen to it when Nicola's husband Roy pulled up outside.

Tina says: "He was white as a ghost and said he'd come straight from driving Holly and Nicola to A&E."

Roy explained that seconds after they had driven off, Holly had collapsed and stopped breathing. When she hadn't come round they'd taken her the short distance to the local hospital, fearing they'd lost her.

When Tina ran into A&E a nurse explained that Holly hadn't been breathing on arrival but had come to before they started work on her. She was being monitored in case she stopped breathing again.

Tina says: "She was hooked up to machines. It was awful. I was terrified wondering what was wrong with my little girl."

At first the couple didn't link it with Holly's "tantrums".

But a doctor on the ward asked if anything like this incident had ever happened before and Tina told him about the "breath-holding".

The following day Holly was diagnosed with RAS and Tina was shocked as doctors told her that Holly had not been holding her breath in anger.

She had been suffering seizures brought on by a lack of blood to the brain. Tina says: "I felt so guilty. But the next morning after taking her home Holly suffered yet another attack."

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"She'd refused to give her toothbrush back after brushing so I'd told her off and the next second she was limp on the floor. It was a nightmare."



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Tina rushed her to hospital and was warned any extreme emotion would cause an attack. With no cure or treatment, Tina was taught to put Holly in the recovery position and assured her daughter's heart would always re-start naturally.

Holly suffers, on average, one or two attacks a week. "Every time it happens I panic and shake as the seconds tick by without her breathing.

"It's also a shame not to let her get too excited. Birthday parties and holidays are always a worry."

For more information on reflex anoxic seizures see [stars.org.uk](http://stars.org.uk).

Read more: <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/woman/3160579/Toddler-who-could-die-if-she-gets-emotional.html#ixzz11ldhe8AQ>

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