



Premature baby girls survive rare version of twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome

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HOLD SUNDAY PAPER ONLY. Twin girls Emma and Ellie with parents Julia and Guy Cooper were born at just 27 weeks, suffering from a rare version of the potentially fatal Twin-to-twin Transfusion Syndrome. Normally this means that one twin takes more than their fare share of the blood supply from the placenta. But in this case, both girls took turns being the dominant twin. The girls have been in the Royal Women's Hospital ever since their birth (17 weeks ago). Picture: David Caird.

ALL identical twins have a special bond, but Emma and Ellie Cooper took theirs to extraordinary lengths in the womb.

The tiny pair, born at just 27 weeks' gestation, have spent the first 17 weeks of their lives in the Royal Women's Hospital. But it was what happened as they grew inside their mother, Julia, that surprised doctors.

The Cooper sisters had become examples of a very rare version of twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome.

In a typical case of this life-threatening condition, one twin takes an unequal share of their mother's single placenta. This means the "recipient" twin deprives the "donor" twin of blood supply, as well as other vital fluids and nutrients. But in the case of Emma and Ellie, they underwent a "spontaneous reversal" of these roles, midway through the pregnancy.

The switch was as rapid as it was unexpected, and led to the girls' dramatic births, three months early, on April 25.

"I had an ultrasound at 8.30am, and we were very quickly told they were coming out that day," Mrs Cooper said.

The babies were delivered by caesarean at the RWH eight hours later. Emma, the recipient-turned-donor, weighed 869g. And Ellie was 943g.

Mrs Cooper's obstetrician, Dr Stephen Cole from the Epworth Freemasons Hospital, said 10-15 per cent of women carrying identical twins (sharing a placenta) will have twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome.

"But only a very small number of those have a reversal," he said. "(In Julia's case) the speed at which things were deteriorating, (delaying the births) another few days may have been disastrous."

Now four weeks past their due date, they weigh 4.1kg (Ellie) and 4.6kg (Emma) and could be just weeks from going home.

"The staff here have been phenomenal," dad Guy said.

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