

# Gynaecological cancer survivor

## I might be little but I'm a fighter!

Amelia Hoppe is one of the bravest little girls in Australia *writes WENDY SQUIRES*

bumped it while playing," Megan, a teacher, recalls. "But as first-time parents, we were concerned enough to take her to our GP."

What followed for the couple was a "hamster wheel of hell" as they took Amelia from doctor to doctor in search of a diagnosis.

Finally, gynaecologist Dr Sonia Grover at the Royal Melbourne Children's Hospital diagnosed Amelia with rhabdomyosarcoma - **a gynaecological cancer affecting just one in 250,000 people in Australasia.** Amelia is thought to be the youngest Aussie ever diagnosed with the incredibly rare condition. When doctors caught it, the cancer had spread to her lymph nodes and was in its most advanced stage.

In the eight months since then, Amelia has endured nine rounds of chemotherapy as well as 23 days straight of external radiation, requiring a general anaesthetic

each time, and 10 days of internal radiation called brachytherapy.

"Removing the tumour was impossible because of where it was," Megan says.

Megan and Benn were soon faced with decisions no parent anticipates with a child so young.

"Within hours of finding out our daughter had cancer we had to decide whether to agree to part of her ovaries being removed, in the hope that one day doctors will be able to harvest an egg from the tissue. **Can you imagine? She's only two and a half and we're trying to ensure her fertility.**

"As her parents of course we hope that one day she'll be able to have a child - but who knows if that will be possible."

### The bigger picture

Megan and Benn were inspired to share their daughter's story with *Woman's Day* to encourage Australians to donate to Save the Box, a fundraising and awareness campaign run by the Australia New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group (ANZGOG).

With gynaecological cancers, the average age of first diagnosis is 62 and the most common forms are uterine, ovarian and cervical. There are also the less common vulval and vaginal cancers, as well as rare pregnancy cancers. **Every day, four Australian women die from gynaecological cancers.**



Benn and Megan with daughters Eve and Amelia.

**'We want to give her every chance of fulfilling the life she would want'**

Amelia's illness rocked her whole family, including younger sibling Eve, who's now a year old.

"I had to give up breastfeeding Eve as I was spending so much time with Amelia in the hospital, with Benn and I taking alternative nights," Megan admits. "It was just too wrenching for us both to have to be away from her."

Thankfully, they had fantastic support in their darkest hour. "The friends, family and community who've surrounded us have been soul-restoring," Benn says.

"I don't know how we could have got through without charity organisations such as Koala Kids and Challenge. Another charity called Redkite gave us financial

support that I'll never be able to thank them enough for."

### Looking to the future

As for Amelia, she chooses not to focus on the months of nausea, internal scalding, sleepless nights, needles and machines.

"She'd throw up for hours, then smile and say 'all done, Mummy'," Megan says. "I don't recall one tantrum about going to hospital."

Amelia's eyelashes are growing back now, as is a soft fuzz of hair on her scalp, and she's thriving

at kindy a couple of days a week. She still attends hospital once a week for IV chemotherapy, and has to take an oral form of chemo every night, which she'll continue with for the next year.

"At 13, she will have to start reconstructive surgery," Megan explains. "We just want to give her every chance of fulfilling the life she would want to lead."

What does Amelia remember most about her time in hospital? "Getting my face painted," she says, with a twirl and a curtsy.

Megan says the illness hasn't broken Amelia's beautiful spirit.

Only in  
WOMAN'S  
DAY

'Amelia was  
always great  
- she barely  
complained'

Amelia's cancer was found at an advanced stage.

SAVE THE  
BOX, SAVE  
LIVES

ANZGOG is asking Australians to help Save the Box and raise much needed funds for gynaecological cancer research. To donate to the Save the Box campaign, buy a T-shirt, register your support for research into gynaecological cancer or for more information visit [savethebox.org.au](http://savethebox.org.au)

SAVE THE BOX



Donate to gynaecological cancer research now