

'Hurry, she can't BREATHE!'



Me, Riya, Mukesh, and Niki

Doctors told Geeta her daughter just had a sore throat, but days later, Riya was fighting for her life...



My daughter Riya



Niki and Riya

Sitting in my room, I could hear my daughters, Riya and Niki, chatting next door. 'That's why Mummy's sad,' Riya said. It was lockdown, and my father had just passed away. Riya, six, was incredibly empathetic, and taking the time to explain to her younger sister what was going on. Any time someone in her life had a problem, Riya would see if there was a way she could help. She was wise beyond her years, too.

'Look up at the stars and he'll be there,' she told me just after Dad died.

Now, I heard her say something just as thoughtful.

'Shall we go and hug Mummy and tell her we love her?' she said.

Moments later, my two girls did just that and it melted my heart.

One winter, a few years later, Riya fell ill.

'You're burning up,' I said, feeling her forehead. 'You must have that bug that's going around.'

However, days passed, and Riya was still feverish and hadn't eaten much.

My office was hosting a children's Christmas party, and

Riya had been really looking forward to it.

When I said she might not be well enough to go, her face fell. Only, then, her temperature dropped.

'Can I go to the party?' she asked.

'I think you should be fine,' I replied.

When we arrived, Riya played with the other kids.

But shortly after, she went quiet, which wasn't like her.

'Let's get you home,' I said.

There, I changed Riya into her pyjamas, gave her some painkillers, then plonked her in front of the TV.

But as the night went on, Riya's condition worsened.

'Riya? Are you OK?' I said, rushing over to her.

But she couldn't get her words out.

Panicked, I rang NHS Direct who suggested her dad, Mukesh, and I take her to hospital.

But when we arrived, we had to wait an hour before we were seen by a nurse.

By this point, Riya was weak and had barely moved.

Her temperature had also spiked again.

When I finally explained Riya's symptoms, the nurse prescribed Paracetamol.

'But it's more than a sore

throat,' I pleaded.

We were sent to paediatrics, where another hour ticked by.

'Mum, I want to go home,' Riya whimpered.

'I know, darling. We're just waiting for the doctor,' I said, gently stroking her head.

By now, it was nearly midnight and there was nowhere comfortable for her to rest while we waited.

When we finally saw the doctor, he checked her heart rate, which was too high given that her temperature had gone down.

'It looks like tonsillitis,' he told us, as he peered down her throat. 'Her mouth and throat are very red.'

'Could it possibly be strep A?' I asked. 'I've looked up the symptoms as it's rife at the moment.'

I pointed out that she didn't have a rash, but she was very ill otherwise.

'No. I think it's viral tonsillitis, and we don't give antibiotics for that,' he replied.

The doctor kept us there while he monitored Riya's heart rate.

But once it had dropped, he



Riya in Paris

told us we could take her home.

'I still think she's too unwell,' I told him.

But he didn't listen. Instead, he told us to give her Ibuprofen, Paracetamol, and a prescribed throat spray.

Mukesh and I took Riya home and tucked her into bed.

Later that morning, Riya was still sleepy.

But at one point, she was able to get up and walk.

She must be getting better, I thought.

But by 8pm, she'd become

weak again and when I tried to give her the throat spray, the back of her throat was white.

'Mukesh!' I cried.

He rushed in and I showed him Riya's throat.

'We need to go to A&E,' he said. But as we got Riya dressed, she looked really unwell.

'I can't breathe,' she croaked. I called 999.

'Hurry, my daughter can't breathe,' I told the call handler. As I did, Riya collapsed.

An ambulance came in two minutes, and the paramedics immediately tried to intubate her, but they struggled as her throat was so blocked.

More paramedics arrived, including ones from the air ambulance and, finally, they got the tube down.

Only, my little girl went into cardiac arrest.

She was resuscitated and

rushed to A&E, but her brain had been starved of oxygen.

Things were so serious that shortly after arriving, she was transported to Great Ormond Street Hospital, where she was put on drugs and antibiotics.

In the following days, Riya's heart started pumping again. But unfortunately, her brain never stopped swelling.

We asked our family to bring Niki to Great Ormond Street so she could see her.

Niki was frightened and didn't fully understand how sick Riya was.

But the nurses were very kind, and showed her what each piece of equipment did, to ease her concerns.

Riya will pull through, we thought. She's a fighter.

But a few days later, one of the nurses spoke to us about organ donation.

It was utterly devastating to

hear — as we knew what it meant — but we both said yes straightaway.

'She's so selfless and always thinking of others,' Mukesh said.

'It's what she would want,' I added.

First, we spent time with her as a family.

We did handprints and Niki carefully painted her sister's nails.

Then, days after we'd rushed her to hospital, my angel passed away.

She was just nine years old.

Four of Riya's organs were donated to four people — including a little girl in Germany who got her heart.

They all had a second chance at life because of Riya's gift.

Following her death, doctors at Great Ormond Street confirmed that she had been infected with Group A Streptococcus — a bacterial infection that can be fatal in its most invasive form.

We were distraught, but rather than let grief consume us, we decided to set up a charity in Riya's name, Riya's Rainbows.

She was such a thoughtful girl, we wanted to carry on her legacy.

We wanted to help provide a space children could escape to when visiting their siblings in Great Ormond Street Hospital.

We also wanted to sponsor

events run by charities who help young children and parents who have lost someone.

Before we knew it, we'd raised almost £100,000.

At an inquest into Riya's death, nine months later, the coroner ruled her death could have been avoided if she had been seen by a second doctor when we'd taken her to hospital the first time.

The consultant who was at the inquest also said he would have admitted her if he had been the doctor.

That's all it would have taken to ensure she received the correct treatment.

The coroner also promised to send an urgent report to the Health Secretary, encouraging the development of a rule that will allow parents to get a second medical

opinion if they are concerned about a misdiagnosis.

Mukesh and I were both angry and devastated.

I knew the signs of strep A, but I was turned away — and at a time when the hospitals were on high alert for it.

My advice to parents is to familiarise yourself with the signs of strep A.

Learn about your child's body and how they respond to illness.

And always ask for a second opinion.

Don't take any chances. It's not worth it.

It could mean the difference between life and death.

Geeta Hirani, 49, Stanmore, London

- To find out more, visit riyasrainbows.com
- To find out more about the symptoms of Streptococcus A and sepsis, visit the NHS website.

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