

Emi's Story

A Stroke Smart Success Story

Based on an account written by Emi's mother, Jill Loftus

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December 8 started like every other day. At the time, Emi was three years old and was no longer napping. I was just getting her settled with her afternoon snack when she said, "Mommy, my thumb feels weird."

I thought nothing of it. I had lots of emails to return and phone calls to make. I gave her a kiss and went back to my office. I sat down and tried to focus again. Then I thought, "Check her smile." I pushed back my chair and trekked back into her room. "Hey Emi, I heard a funny joke yesterday," I started. Her response was normal, but her smile was slightly askew. I puzzled over that until I again heard a clear voice saying, "Take her and go now." It was clear.

At that point, I knew it must be serious. I did not want to wait on an ambulance because we live in a very wooded neighborhood and it's often hard to just get pizza delivered to the correct address. I grabbed Emi's jacket to get her ready to go, and she could not get her arm through the sleeve. I ran out the door, leaving my husband confused. By the time we made the 15 minutes trip to downtown Norfolk, Emi was slouched down in her car seat and could not sit up straight.

[Note: In typical situations, the best practice is to call 9-1-1 and ride in the ambulance.]

I remembered my mom had talked to me about the signs of a stroke a few months prior. She wanted me to be aware of them in case I needed to recognize them in her one day. I did not remember all of them, but I did remember the time was of great importance. As soon as we got in the emergency room, I started loudly yelling, "Help me! My child is having a stroke!"

It took only a minute or two for someone to run out of the back and collect me. They ushered Emi back immediately and began running tests.

When they came back, they confirmed that Emi had had a stroke. The doctor who was on call had been working in emergency trauma for 35 years and had never seen a pediatric patient make it to the hospital within the allotted window to administer a clot buster.

I asked specifically about the treatment. They still needed to determine where the clot originated. If it came from her carotid artery a clot buster could cause her to bleed out within a matter of minutes. They were unsure what to do.

As the doctor was on the phone with a colleague, I spoke to my husband. We believed she needed a clot buster...fast! As soon as the doctor came back I said, "Please. Give it to her now. Don't wait any longer".



Figure 1. Emi, Age 3

Eventually, they decided to give her the medicine over the course of an hour. Every 15 minutes when they checked her, she was remarkably better. At first, she could not lift her arm, but after 15 minutes, she could lift her fingers. After 15 more she could hold her arm out straight. After 45 minutes, she could wiggle her fingers and after an hour, she was up and walking. A whole child! Talking and laughing with no obvious cognitive damage.

We stayed in the PICU for three days so they could monitor her. On the last day she was taken for a scan, and it happened to be the same person administering it that was there when we came into the emergency room. He came out after her scan weeping. How could this be the same child? Her scan was normal. There was ZERO effect from massive stroke three days earlier. My child who could not sit up straight or support her own body weight snuggled with me in the PICU for three days playing Guess Who and Uno. We had fun. We watched movies.

When we left Emi walked out on her own. She didn't need a wheelchair. We took her directly from the hospital to my oldest daughter's Christmas concert and she danced in the aisle. There are no residual effects. We have seen doctors from cardiology, hematology, and genetics. She is a normal, healthy, four-year-old, and all I am left with from that day is a level of gratefulness for grace that I will never truly understand myself.

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Figure 2. Emi playing soccer