

Meghan Trainor Talks Candidly About the Emotional and Physical Pain of Her Difficult Pregnancy and Childbirth

By Michelle Konstantinovsky



Meghan Trainor's new song, "[Glow Up](#)" may be an anthem for anyone on the brink of a positive life shift, but for Trainor, the lyrics are deeply personal. After giving birth to her first child, Riley on February 8, Trainor was ready to reclaim her body, her health, and her life — all of which were put to the test during a tumultuous pregnancy and a challenging delivery that left her son in the newborn intensive care unit for four days.

The first snag in Grammy winner's first-time pregnancy journey came in her second trimester, when she received an unexpected diagnosis: [gestational diabetes](#), a disease that affects about [6% to 9% of pregnant women](#) in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Without the gestational diabetes, I was a rock star," the singer tells SHAPE. "I was really good at being pregnant, I did great. I never got sick in the beginning, I questioned a lot, 'am I pregnant? I know I haven't had my cycle and the test says it, but I feel normal.'"

Trainor says that it was a random joke at a routine check-up that led to her eventual diagnosis with the illness, which often [doesn't cause noticeable symptoms for most women](#). "I did a blood test because I was trying to make a joke and ease up the room," she says. "I said, 'my mom said she had gestational diabetes but she thinks it's because she drank a big orange juice that morning and that's what spiked her blood sugar.'"

Trainor's lighthearted comment inadvertently alerted her doctors to a potential red flag. While the causes of gestational diabetes aren't well understood, many affected [have at least](#) one close family member with the disease or another form of diabetes. And her mom's blood sugar spike wasn't just a funny anecdote — it clued her team into the fact that her mom had likely experienced an abnormal reaction to sugar, a potential sign of the illness. To [test for glucose intolerance](#) in pregnant women, doctors often administer a test in which the patient drinks a super sugary solution after fasting and then has their blood tested at regular intervals for several hours.

Trainor's first results were normal, but she was diagnosed with the disease at 16 weeks. "I was like, okay what do I have to do?" she says. "You have to check your blood after every meal and in the morning so four times a day you're pricking your finger and testing your blood and making sure your levels are right. You're relearning how to eat food and I've never had a great relationship with food, so that was a challenge to figure out."

Trainor says the experience was unexpectedly emotional and while she initially called it "[a bump in the road](#)," the constant monitoring and feedback had a significant impact. "On the days when you fail the test but you did everything right, you just feel like the biggest failure," she says. "You're like, I'm a failure as a mom already and the baby's not even here. So it was very emotionally tough. It was really hard and I still think there's still not enough out there that can help women with gestational diabetes."

But the diagnosis was just the first challenge Trainor faced in delivering her son. As she told her Instagram followers in a [January 21 Instagram post](#), her baby was [breech](#), meaning he was positioned head-up in the uterus, with his feet pointed toward the birth canal — an issue that occurs in about [3-4% of all pregnancies](#).

"At 34 weeks, he was in the [right] position, he was ready to go!" she says. "And then the week after, he flipped. He just loved being sideways, so his booty was down here and his head was over here and feet were sticking out sideways. I was like, 'he's comfy here, so I'll readjust my brain to get ready for a C-section. I did all my research on what to expect and in all my research I did not hear anything of, 'hey your baby might come out with extra fluid so he may not cry right away and he might be sent to the NICU.'"

What Trainer encountered during delivery — just a [few days shy of her due date](#) — was another unanticipated obstacle she felt wholly unprepared for. "When he finally came out, I remember we were looking at him like, 'wow he's stunning,' and I was in shock," she says. "We were all so

happy and celebrating and then I was like, why isn't he crying? Where is that cry?' And it just never came."

The next few minutes were a whirlwind as Trainer — medicated and in a state of euphoria after seeing her son for the first time — tried to piece together the sequence of events from behind the surgical drapes. "They said, 'we're gonna take him up,' and my husband begged them to let me look at him," she says. "So they ran him over and ran right out, so I had one second to look at him."

Trainor says that to this day, she's not entirely sure what happened to Riley in those first few moments, but after he was immediately rushed out of the room, doctors brought him to the NICU where he was given a feeding tube. "They just told me it was all about when he wanted to wake up," she says. "I was like, 'wake up?' It was definitely spooky. They told me this happens with C-section babies and I was like, 'why have I never heard of it? Why is this a common thing and no one's freaking out when to me he looks like he has feeding tubes and tubes everywhere. It was super frustrating and super hard."

[Heather Irobunda, M.D.](#), a New York City-based obstetrician gynecologist and a member of [Peloton's wellness advisory council](#) who has not treated Trainor says the singer's story is all too familiar. "It sounds like her baby may have had [transient tachypnea of the newborn](#) (TTN), which is more likely to happen to babies born via C-section," she says, noting that she typically sees the condition several times a week in her own practice. "When a baby is born through the vagina, the journey through the birth canal squeezes the baby's chest, which causes some of the fluid that would collect in the lungs to be squeezed out and come out of the baby's mouth. However, during a C-section, there's no squeeze through the vagina, so the fluid can collect in the lungs."

In a [review of 33,289 term deliveries](#) (between 37 to 42 weeks), the incidence of TTN was 5.7 per 1,000 births. Other [research](#) indicates that the incidence of TTN is inversely proportional to a child's gestational age, affecting about 10% of infants delivered between 33 and 34 weeks, about 5% between 35 and 36 weeks, and less than 1% in term infants. The prognosis for the condition is considered "excellent," and most symptoms usually resolve within 48 hours, although more serious cases can occur.

"Usually, we get worried about the baby having this if at birth, the baby seems to be working really hard to breathe," Irobunda says. "Also, we may notice that the oxygen levels in the baby are lower than normal. So if this happens, the baby has to stay in the NICU to get more oxygen."

Trainor says that after a few days, Riley finally began to improve — but she wasn't prepared to go home. "I was in so much pain," she says. "I was like, 'I won't survive at home, let me stay here.'"

After an extra recovery day in the hospital, Trainor and her husband, actor Daryl Sabara, brought Riley home. But the physical and emotional pain of the experience took a toll. “I found myself in a place of pain I’ve never been before,” she says. “The hardest part was when you come home, that’s when your pain hits. I’d walk around and be fine but then I’d lay down to go to bed and the pain would hit. I remembered the surgery and I would tell my husband while crying, ‘I can still feel them doing the surgery.’ Now the pain is connected to the memory so that was really hard to get over for like two weeks to let my brain forget about it.”

The turning point for Trainor came when she got the stamp of approval to start working out again — a moment she says paved the way for the “glow up” she sings about in her new track featured in the latest Verizon campaign announcing the company’s [biggest 5G upgrade to date](#) (“I was like, I literally have a song called “Glow Up” and I’ve been glowing up my life — this is made for me,” she says of the partnership).

“The day my doctor approved me to exercise — I was itching for it — I immediately started walking and started feeling myself come back to being a human being,” she says. “I was like, I want to focus on my health, I want to get back to feeling my body again. When I was nine months pregnant, I could barely stand up from the couch, so I couldn’t wait to start my journey to focus on me for my child.”

Trainor began working with a nutritionist and trainer, and four months after giving birth, she says she’s thriving — and so is Riley. “He’s perfectly fine now,” she says. “Totally healthy. Everyone’s just hearing about this now and is like, ‘what a traumatic thing,’ and I’m like, ‘oh we’re shining now — that was four months ago.’”

While Trainor is grateful for her family’s health, but recognizes the good fortune she had in emerging from the rocky journey to motherhood. She extends empathy to other pregnant women and fellow new moms navigating the tough times, and offers some words of wisdom.

“Finding a good support system is key,” she says. “I have the most amazing mom and the most amazing husband that are there every single day for me and my team. When you surround yourself with good people, good things happen to you. And be inspired by that baby that came out of you. You grew that thing. It’s because of you they’re alive right now — that’s amazing. So take that and motivate yourself. I want my son to watch me accomplish everything so he knows he can do that.”