

By KATE
FOSTER

It should have been the happiest time of her life. But when Catherine Carver gave birth to her daughter, it triggered a serious mental illness that led to hallucinations and paranoia.

Mrs Carver and her husband Tom were delighted to welcome baby Beatrix into the world in January 2016.

But within hours of the birth she started to believe her daughter had been swapped and went on to experience a range of terrifying thoughts and hallucinations.

Now she has recovered, Mrs Carver is speaking out about her experience to raise awareness and tackle the stigma around mental health problems.

The 33-year-old from Edinburgh fell ill with postpartum psychosis, a serious mental illness that affects one in 1,000 new mothers. She said: 'It came on basically within hours of the birth. I didn't realise I was ill.'

Mrs Carver, a science writer, began to think her baby had been switched and that the nurses who were telling her how much Beatrix looked like her father Tom were all part of a conspiracy. She then believed road signs were delivering messages to her.

'I didn't realise I was ill. I put things down to things like sleep deprivation, the shock of becoming a new mum,' she said. 'So I thought all of these things together probably explained why I felt a little bit off.'

'There were other things that really should have alerted me to the fact that something was very wrong.'

'I believed road signs were tailored messages for me. I saw a sign which said, "Please observe at all times" and I thought it was telling everybody else they should be observing me at all times.'

NINE months after the birth, as her condition deteriorated, she was admitted to the mother and baby psychiatric unit at St John's Hospital, Livingston, West Lothian. She said: 'I remember walking down this completely bare corridor that felt barren and empty and frightening.'

'I heard a baby scream and I thought, this is where they collect up bad mothers and swap their babies for robots. I felt convinced of that and turned round and just ran as fast as I could in the opposite direction.'

Mr Carver, a 33-year-old software developer, and a nurse had to catch her and return her to the ward. Other disturbing incidents she experienced included hearing the voice of a little girl counting, seeing a psychedelic display of tigers, lions and the cast of the movie Jumanji appear on the wall of the ward.

She said: 'A voice in my head started to go, "That probably isn't quite right that you're seeing all those things".'

After first going home following six weeks of treatment, Mrs Carver was admitted two more times.

Her treatment included medication and electroconvulsive therapy, which involves sending an electric current through the brain to trigger a seizure that can

relieve the symptoms of some mental health problems.

She said: 'They were supportive as ever. They helped me pick up the pieces of my life and put them back together again and got me more confident with Bea, which was really important.'

Postpartum psychosis can result in various symptoms, from anxiety and profound sadness to

chattiness, hyperactivity and euphoria. Women may experience hallucinations and delusions.

It is more common in women who have bipolar disorder but can affect anyone and women who have never previously experienced mental illness.

Earlier this month singer Adele praised her best friend, author and illustrator Laura Dockrill,

who also dealt with postpartum psychosis. In an Instagram post Adele said: 'She had my beautiful godson six months ago and it was the biggest challenge of her life.'

'Mamas, talk about how you are feeling because it could save yours or someone else's life.'

MRS Carver had previously relied on her sharp mind that earned her a double first at Cambridge, a medical degree and a Master's from Harvard.

She has written a science book about the immune system and works as a writer for health and social care companies.

Thanking the medical staff and her family who helped her through her illness, she added: 'I'd lost my confidence as a mother.'

'I thought I was a crazy mum and I couldn't be trusted. But they helped rebuild that confidence. I do think they saved my life.'

Mrs Carver also found help and information through charity Action on Postpartum Psychosis. Today Beatrix, now two, is thriving.

She loves going to swing parks and singing nursery rhymes.

Her mother said: 'It's so easy to think it's your fault and it means you're a bad mum but that's not true at all.'

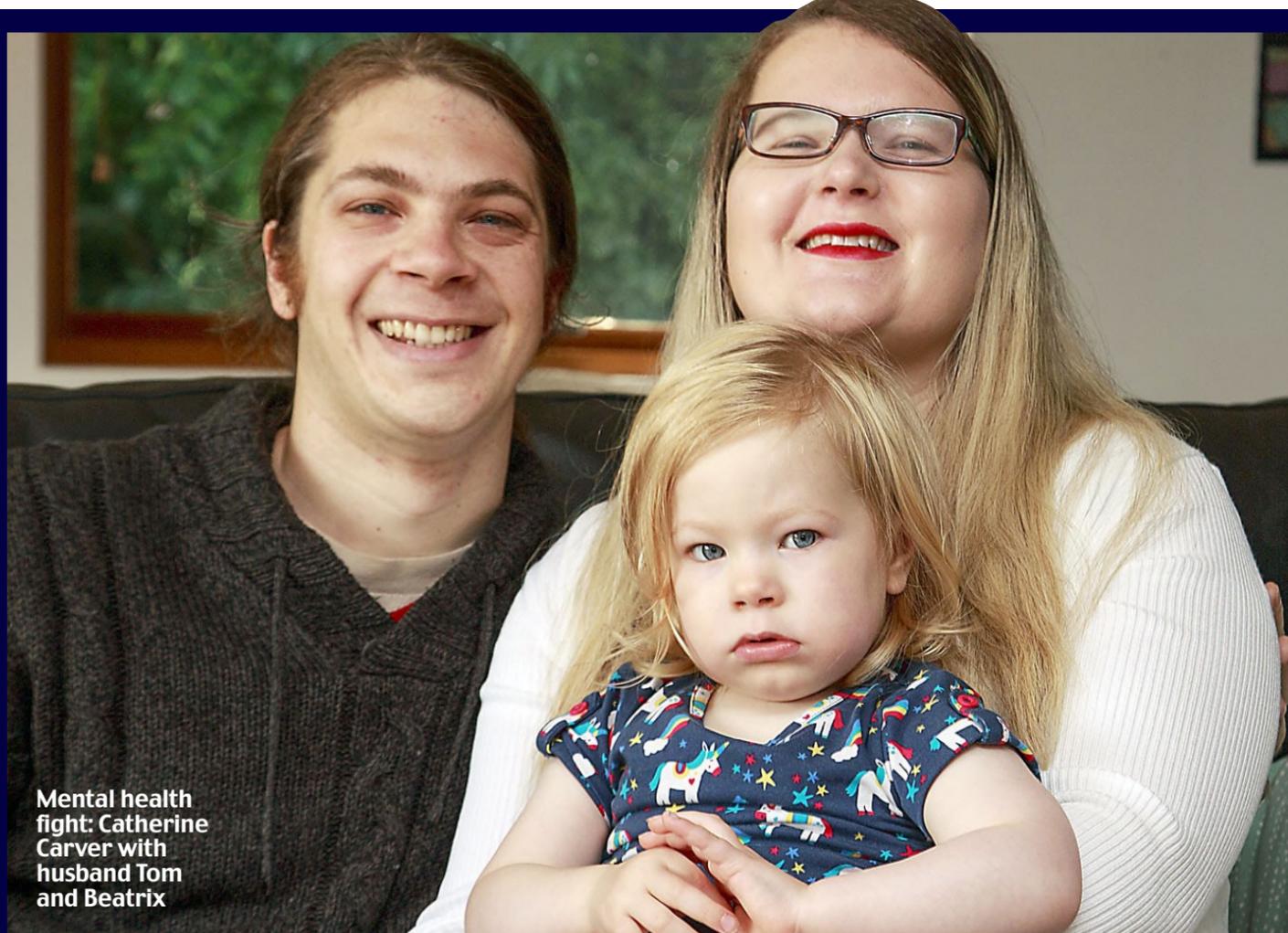
'It's an illness like any other and people just need to be able to be supported through it.'

'We need to tackle the stigma that I think is still associated with maternal mental health problems.'

Dr Jessica Heron, director of national charity Action on Postpartum Psychosis, said: 'Postpartum psychosis can affect any woman after childbirth.'

'APP have been working hard to ensure that there are sufficient mother and baby unit beds throughout the UK, that health professionals are trained in the management of postpartum psychosis and that women and their partners have access to the information and support they need to recover.'

She added: 'It has been a silent illness for too long and we need to bring it into public awareness and combat the stigma and shame women feel when trying to recover from it.'



Mental health fight: Catherine Carver with husband Tom and Beatrix

Horrid symptoms that can affect 1 in 1,000 new mothers

How birth of my daughter sparked psychosis ordeal

WHAT'S IN IT?

We reveal the ingredients in everyday products

WE REVEAL the ingredients in everyday products. Dioralyte Blackcurrant

Sodium chloride: this is the chemical name for salt, which is lost from the body through fluid. Salt is an electrolyte (which conducts electric impulses in the body) essential for many vital functions, such as contracting muscles and helping regulate fluid levels.
Potassium chloride: this is a salt used to replace potassium lost by the body in dehydration. Potassium is another electrolyte needed by the body for muscle contraction and nutrient flow. It regulates blood pressures by counteracting the effects of sodium.



Glucose: Another word for sugar. The body relies on sugar for energy. In rehydration sachets, glucose also helps with the absorption of water and electrolytes through the intestines and into the body.

Disodium hydrogen citrate: This is an acidic salt which makes urine more alkaline by neutralising any excess acid in blood and urine. This is important because if urine is too acidic – which can happen following a bad bout of diarrhoea – it can encourage bacterial growth, which can lead to urinary tract infections.

Silicon Dioxide: an anti-caking agent used to stop the powder from sticking together.