

# Christine's Story

## Stroke Survivor Christine Burke Worthen

In March of 2009, Christine Burke Worthen gave birth to her second child, Zachary. Despite suffering some nagging headaches, the 36-year-old left the hospital looking forward to resuming her life as a mother and attorney.

Over the course of the next week, the headaches became worse, so Christine called her doctor for advice. The doctor thought that spinal anesthesia given during her labor might be the cause. She was told to drink more caffeine and lie down. She followed the instructions, but the headaches continued.

Eventually the pain became so bad it made her cry. On the morning of April 2, 2009, she went to the emergency room. Her doctors intended to treat her for leaking fluid in her spine, which they believed to be the cause of her headaches.

While in the examining room, Christine suddenly lost function of the right side of her body. Her speech was slurred and she had trouble communicating. She did not understand what was happening, nor did her doctors. She was sent to another part of the hospital for further diagnosis. Although she exhibited classic stroke symptoms, no one thought she was having a stroke. The ER doctor encouraged her to stay the night for a brain scan in the morning. The next day, tests confirmed the unthinkable: She had suffered a stroke. She cried at the news, thinking that her 4-year-old and newborn might lose their mother.

Although doctors could not pinpoint the cause of the stroke, they believed it was related to the childbirth. As a result, she can have no more children. Over time, however, her life returned to normal. She regained use of her right arm. An avid runner, she has started to run again. She still feels some residual weakness, and sometimes slurs her speech, but says, "Those are small prices to pay for a second chance at life."

Thinking about her experience, Christine says, "It's important for folks to understand the signs of stroke since time is so precious... prompt medical attention is a must."

