

The Hopday family - mum Claudia, son Arthur, daughter Zoe and husband Ben - have been through so much.



I SPOTTED MY DAUGHTER'S TUMOUR

CLAUDIA HOPDAY'S SHOCK DISCOVERY SAVED HER DAUGHTER'S LIFE

For most parents, celebrating their child's birthday is a time for joy and happiness. But for mum Claudia Hopday, on the day her daughter Zoe turned 4, her family's lives changed forever.

After tucking Zoe into bed following a day of festivities, Claudia settled down to look over photos from the party - only to make a shocking discovery. As she glanced upon a photo of her daughter looking cross-eyed, she knew something was very wrong.

A series of tests revealed that little Zoe had a tumour behind her left eye, caused by neurofibromatosis (NF).

What's more, Claudia and her eldest son Arthur, 10, also had the hereditary condition, which causes tumours to form in the brain, spinal cord and nerves.

Now, the family are hoping to bring light to the condition that affects one in 2500 adults and children in Australia.

"Every day we learn new

things about NF," Claudia, 34, from Wyoming, NSW tells New Idea. "What was initially quite overwhelming has simply become a part of who we are now, but that does not mean we are not vigilant of how quickly things can change."

Growing up, Claudia had no idea that she had type 1 NF. She spent her whole life unaware there was even such a condition until her daughter was diagnosed.

After looking through the



Mum Claudia noticed daughter Zoe's eye looked crossed shortly after her 4th birthday party.

THE PHOTO THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING!

photos of Zoe's birthday, Claudia suspected something might be amiss. She noticed Zoe's left eye seemed crossed.

"I dismissed it and thought she was probably just excited and tired," she recalls.

But after monitoring it for a couple of days, Claudia took her kids to get their eyes tested.

While Arthur's eyes were perfect. Zoe was referred onto an ophthalmologist. After hours of seemingly benign tests, Claudia was told to take Zoe straight to the children's hospital for an MRI.

"The ophthalmologist said she thought something was pushing up against her eye. We were eventually admitted and were told they suspected she had neurofibromatosis, and that I had it, too," she says.

A neurologist confirmed Zoe had a tumour on her left optic nerve, and that both her and Claudia had the condition. What's more, they encouraged Arthur to be tested, too.

"It was so overwhelming," Claudia recalls. "At first I was

crying all the time. I would never cry in front of the kids, but it would be in the shower, when she was sleeping."

Just three weeks later,

'EVERY DAY WE ARE LEARNING NEW THINGS ABOUT NF'

Zoe had lost control of her eye, was disoriented and complaining of headaches. A visit to the doctor revealed the tumour had grown and she needed chemotherapy as soon as possible.

"As we started to learn more about the condition and its potential impact, some pieces of my own story started to fall into place," says Claudia.

"In 2017, I had discovered a lump in my left breast, but was told it was not serious. In August 2019, another lump appeared in my right breast. Considering my NF diagnosis, I had a scan and two biopsies

to check for malignancies." She was told she had intraductal papilloma, a type of benign lump, and that it had to be surgically removed.

That same year, Arthur was diagnosed, too.

"At that point it wasn't a shock, we suspected it already," recalls Claudia.

The mum says that passing on the condition to her children weighs on her.

"If I had known earlier, I would have gone down the IVF route to have Arthur and Zoe," she adds.

While Zoe can't see through her left eye, she is rebuilding her strength and thriving in kindergarten.

What's more, the Children's Tumour Foundation offered support to the family.

"They've been amazing," says Claudia. "If you had any questions, they'd answer them. They're always there if you need a shoulder to cry on."

Now, Claudia hopes to shine a light on the condition. While the Australian Government has, this year, committed to investing \$8 million towards supporting the Children's Tumour Foundation and neurofibromatosis research, more work needs to be done.

"My hopes are, in the next few years, it gets out there and people are more aware and know what it is," she says.

"Some GPs have no idea what it is and the more we talk about it, the more we bring it forward, the more research there is and eventually a cure."

By Courtney Greatrex

"She is fantastic," smiles Claudia. "Her hair has grown back now, so thick and beautiful, as well as gained all the weight she lost during chemo."

• For more information, visit the Children's Tumour Foundation at ctf.org.au



Zoe was extremely brave while in hospital undergoing chemotherapy.