

One body, two faces: rare twins born in Sydney (Update)

May 12 2014

An Australian couple have welcomed the birth of conjoined twins who have separate brains and identical faces but share a body, describing their girls as "little Aussie fighters", a report said Monday.

Sydney couple Renee Young and Simon Howie learned at a 19-week ultrasound that their babies would be born with a rare condition called diprosopus, Woman's Day magazine reported.

"Even though there is only one body, we call them our twins," Howie told the magazine.

"To us, they are our girls and we love them."

Young gave birth last Thursday by emergency caesarean, some six weeks early.

Named Hope and Faith, the girls share one unusually-shaped skull with duplicated facial features and separate brains joined at the stem. They have one set of limbs and organs.

They are in intensive care at the Westmead Children's Hospital in Sydney's west where they have impressed doctors with their progress.

"They are breathing perfectly on their own and feeding," Howie said, adding that they had their first bath on Sunday night.

"They are little Aussie fighters."

Woman's Day said the girls were conjoined in an extremely rare way and the implications of their condition was not fully clear, but they were being monitored closely in hospital.

"We have no idea how long they will be in hospital," said Howie, who has seven other children in his family with Young.

"We just want to bring them home, happy and healthy to make our family a little bit bigger and a bit more chaotic."

Woman's Day said there had only been 35 cases in which babies with diprosopus—meaning two faces—were born joined in a similar way as the girls. None have survived.

"Their face had actually duplicated.... they actually have their own brain; two arms, two legs, one body and the one heart beat," Howie told the Nine television network.

The couple said they could not face terminating the pregnancy, despite fears about the sisters' survival.

"The heart beat was beautiful," Young said in an interview with Nine before the birth. "If I only get two days with the baby, I only get two days with the baby. At least I get some time with it.

"I want people to know about it. It does happen. It might be very rare, but it does happen," she added.

Sitting in the intensive care ward with her newborns, Young said that doctors had told her they didn't know what the future held for her girls.

"We are still in unknown territory," she said.

"I'm proud as punch," Howie said. "Just to see them come this far when all the odds were against us to be honest."

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