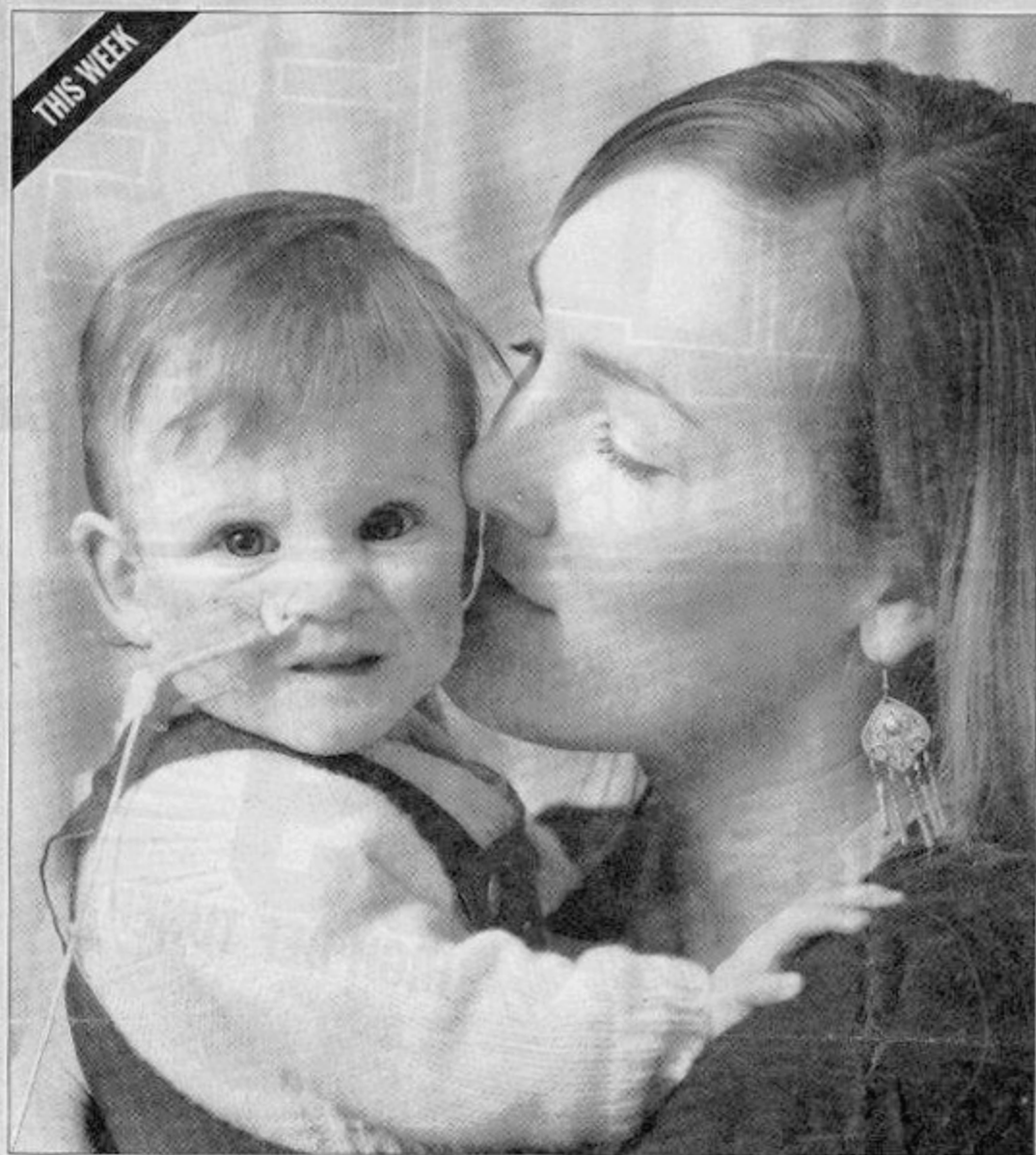


Elora was born not much bigger than an orange, but now she's charging ahead



Who's a big girl now: Baby Elora with mother Adele De Bondi. Elora weighed in at only 319g.

Main picture: AARON FRANCIS



Baby, look at me now

IF all had gone to plan, Elora De Bondi would have celebrated her first birthday days ago.

Instead, the gutsy Melbourne toddler — born almost four months premature and weighing only 319g — reached that milestone in January.

Ever since doctors told mother Adele her only child had “no chance of being born alive”, Elora has been a medical marvel.

Australia's smallest surviving baby, Elora now tips the scales at 6.5kg and is charging ahead.

EVONNE BARRY
Health reporter

A thin feeding tube — and her place in the record books — are the only obvious clues to the 16-month-old's dramatic start.

She spent her first seven months in the Royal Women's Hospital. But Elora is now happy and relatively healthy at home in Montmorency.

Once “as long as a ballpoint pen”, she now stretches to 69cm and is not far off taking her first steps.

“She's a very active and happy girl and very content. She loves

playing and crawls like a speeding bullet,” Ms De Bondi said.

Since Elora arrived by emergency caesarean on January 29 last year, she has suffered “almost everything under the sun”, Ms De Bondi said.

Elora survived renal failure, chronic lung disease and many staph infections. Eating and swallowing are difficult because “she's had so many tubes put down her throat”.

The Royal Women's Hospital clinical director of nurseries, Sue Jacobs, said it was difficult to predict the quality of life for premature babies.

“Elora's a bubbly, smiley and happy baby and that's fabulous, but there's still a lot of uncertainty about how she will be in the long term,” she said.

Ms De Bondi, 29, is now committed to supporting those who helped save her daughter, including the Royal Women's Hospital Foundation and Life's Little Treasures, a support group for Victorian families with premature babies.

To make a donation to the Women's Foundation or Life's Little Treasures, visit www.thewomens.org.au and www.lifeslittletreasures.org.au.