

Coping with prem babies

Shaun Turton

AT 27 weeks pregnant, Janine Loader was told her twin daughters would have a better chance of survival outside the womb.

The life she knew stopped. Identical twins Samantha and Abigail were born at 6.33pm on June 18 last year, nearly three months premature.

With Samantha weighing 790g and Abigail 498g – no more than a tub of butter – the neonatal unit at Heidelberg's Mercy Hospital for Women became the centre of Mrs Loader's world.

"You enter into this really bizarre world of rules and washing your hands after everything," Mrs Loader, of

Watsonia, said. "It's a rollercoaster ride – they go up and down. One day they might put on 30g; the next day they might lose 50g."

After three months Samantha was allowed to go home to her parents and elder sister Olivia, followed two months later by Abigail. "It was great to have them home but very difficult because you're not only a mother, but a nurse," Mrs Loader said.

Both girls finally went off oxygen last month.

More than 1560 premature babies were treated at the Royal Women's Hospital in 2006, with 490 needing special attention in the neo-

natal intensive care unit.

Mrs Loader hopes to raise awareness of the challenges facing parents of premature babies on National Premmie Day on July 25.

Parool Shah, president of Life's Little Treasures, a charity that supports parents of premature babies, said the day also aimed to celebrate the miracle of survival. "Unless people have gone through it themselves they don't know about the trauma and journeys that families go through with premature birth," she said.

Details: www.prembaby.org.au.



Janine Loader with 12-month-old twins Samantha and Abigail and their elder sister, Olivia. 3. Photo: MARK FREDERICKS/GETTY IMAGES

