



THREE-YEAR-OLD GRAYSON IS AUSTRALIA'S REAL-LIFE BENJAMIN BUTTON DUE TO A RARE DISORDER



Grayson's body is older than his years, but he still manages a smile.



Watching Bundaberg boy Grayson Little rolling around in the mud, you'd think he was just like any other 3-year-old. But behind his playful, cheeky grin, Grayson is battling a heartbreaking rare

illness that affects just one in a million. Diagnosed at birth with a rare premature-ageing disorder known as dyskeratosis congenita (DC), it means Grayson's cells don't regenerate and his organs progressively deteriorate, leaving his body like that of an old man.

"His prognosis was so grim that doctors didn't expect he would make it this far, so every day is a bonus for us," says his mum Rachel. And despite the odds stacked against him, Grayson from day one constantly stunned and surprised everyone. "Doctors didn't even know

if he'd be able to crawl, climb or walk," Rachel adds. "But he's achieved all of that and walks with a frame." While Grayson is very frail and fragile – many would dub him the real-life Benjamin Button trapped inside the body of an 80-year-old – his loving parents refuse to deprive their boy of a normal childhood.

"We decided not to wrap him in cotton wool and let him enjoy everything other little boys do," says Rachel. But Grayson's fate is heartache that no parent should have to endure. Rachel and Leighton, both 28, have had no choice but to be strong and soldier on with a smile, making the most of the time they have with Grayson. "He really is like an old man," Rachel says. "His bones are so frail they can fracture easily. He's already suffered a crushed vertebrae as a result. His fingers are wrinkly, his skin thin and the cells inside his nose are so fragile, he has frequent nose bleeds."

Similar to other children with DC, Grayson has underdeveloped motor skills, language, and physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as had to have two bone marrow transplants. "Everything takes its toll on him," Rachel explains. "And where Grayson's muscles are weak, he gets tired easily and needs to rest a lot." But one thing that is strong is his heart, and it's not surprising as, for someone so young, Grayson has so much love to give. "He loves life," Rachel says. "He can't talk, but he loves to laugh and giggle. He also loves the outdoors, playing with his

trucks and diggers and loves giving mummy and daddy the best kisses and cuddles." It's all these things the Little family cherish and, despite the older Grayson gets and his increasing risk of developing cancers and other complications, they take each day as it comes. Since his transplant, Grayson has shown what a determined young man he is and he's as smiley as ever. "He is one in a million, that's for sure," says Rachel, adding that their heartbreak is laced with happiness as the family of three prepare to become a family of four! "I'm due any day now,"

Rachel reveals. "And Grayson is so excited to have a little brother. He's even been practising holding the bottle so he can feed him." To help other families, Rachel set up the Facebook page, Little Grayson's Journey with Dyskeratosis Congenita. It's an open and honest account about her thoughts, feelings and journey as a mother of a boy with DC. "It's helped others as well as me cope and find support," Rachel admits. "With Grayson, we can't plan for the future, but we can make the most of every second of every minute of every day with our precious boy."

'MY SON'S TRAPPED INSIDE THE BODY OF AN 80-YEAR-OLD'