

Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy

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Intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy (ICP) is a liver disorder that happens during pregnancy. It usually happens in the second or third trimester and goes away soon after delivery.

The liver is the largest organ in the belly. It sits high in the belly, mostly on the right side with a small extension to the left. One of the functions of the liver is to make bile. Bile helps the body digest food — especially fat. Bile is transferred from the liver into the intestine through a tube called the bile duct.

ICP affects the flow of bile. This causes bile to build up in the liver, enter your bloodstream and cause itching.

Symptoms

ICP causes severe itching without a rash. It usually starts on the palm of your hands and the soles of your feet. It is usually worse at night and can spread to other areas of your body.

Other symptoms may include:

- poor sleep
- nausea (upset stomach)
- poor appetite
- abdominal pain
- fatty stools.

After delivery, bile flow returns to normal and the symptoms will go away.

Cause

The cause of ICP is unknown.

ICP often happens when estrogen reaches its highest level during pregnancy. This is during the second or third trimester.

Your risk for ICP may be higher if you have personal or family history of ICP or a history of liver disease. ICP is also more common if you are pregnant with twins.

There is no known way to prevent ICP.

Diagnosis

To confirm if you have ICP, you will have blood work done to check the level of bile in your bloodstream and check your liver function.

In most cases, itching will start before your blood work shows that you have higher levels of bile in your bloodstream. You may need to have blood work done often until it is confirmed.

How ICP Can Affect Your Unborn Baby

ICP can:

- increase the risk of premature birth and stillbirth
- increase the risk of newborn respiratory distress syndrome (This condition makes it hard for your baby to breathe.)
- cause meconium to be present in the amniotic fluid. (Meconium is your baby's first stool.) This can cause breathing problems for your baby after birth.

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Treatment

The goal of treatment is to relieve itching and help prevent complications during pregnancy.

Ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA) is the most common medicine used to treat ICP.

This medicine may help:

- relieve itching
- lower the level of bile and liver enzymes in your bloodstream
- reduce the risk of complications to your baby.

Care During and After Your Pregnancy

- Your health care provider will monitor your baby closely during your pregnancy.
- In most cases, delivering your baby before your due date is recommended to reduce complications.
- The itching will usually go away in the first few days after delivery. Your liver tests should return to normal.
- You will be able to breastfeed your baby.

Once you have ICP, your risk of having it again during a future pregnancy is higher.