

# Intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy (ICP)

ICP is a pregnancy condition that can cause itching. It is not dangerous for the pregnant person.

But in some cases it can increase the risk of a baby being born early.

## Symptoms

The most common symptom of ICP is itching. This can range from quite mild to very severe. It usually starts after 20 weeks of pregnancy. It is often on many parts of your body including the palms of your hands or the soles of your feet. It does not cause a rash. But it might look red if you have scratched a lot.

**If you are more than 20 weeks pregnant and have itching that is not linked to a rash, then you should contact your maternity care team.**

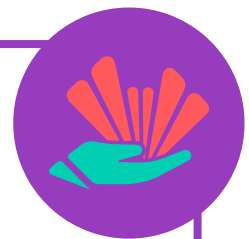
## Tests

Itching in pregnancy is very common and is not always caused by ICP. To diagnose ICP, health professionals such as doctors or midwives will ask you a number of questions and examine you. If they think you might have ICP you will need some blood tests.

### How we can help

The Liver UK support team are here for you and for your family and friends. Find out more more at **[liveruk.org/support](https://www.liveruk.org/support)**

Call our nurse-led helpline to talk to one of our team: **0800 652 7330**



Liver UK is the new name  
for the British Liver Trust  
and Children's Liver  
Disease Foundation

**[www.liveruk.org](https://www.liveruk.org)**  
**email: [info@liveruk.org](mailto:info@liveruk.org)**

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## Diagnosis

It is likely that you have ICP if your blood tests show a bile acid level of  $19\mu\text{mol/L}$  or more, you have itching and you are otherwise well. Doctors can only be sure that you have ICP if your itching and bile acids go back to normal after your baby is born.

ICP is divided into 3 groups, depending on the highest amount of bile acid found in your tests. Bile acid is measured in micromoles per litre. You might see this written as  $\mu\text{mol/L}$ ,  $\text{umol/L}$ , or  $\text{micromol/L}$ .

- **Mild ICP** - Itching and peak bile acid concentration of  $19\text{--}39\ \mu\text{mol/L}$
- **Moderate ICP** - Itching and a peak bile acid concentration of  $40\text{--}99\ \mu\text{mol/L}$
- **Severe ICP** - Itching and a peak bile acid concentration of  $100$  or more  $\mu\text{mol/L}$

## How will ICP affect me?

ICP is not dangerous for you, and it should get better soon after your baby is born. People with ICP have an increased risk of a condition called pre-eclampsia. You should have regular blood pressure and urine dip stick tests to check for this. The itching of ICP can be severe and very distressing. Some people find that antihistamine medicines can help with this. Talk to your midwife or doctor about which medicines are safe to try in pregnancy.

## Will ICP affect my baby?

It is unlikely that ICP will cause any serious problems for your baby.

- It can increase the risk of your baby being born early.
- It can increase the chance of meconium in your amniotic fluid. Meconium is your baby's first poo.
- ICP can sometimes increase the risk of stillbirth late in pregnancy. This is rare, and the risk can be reduced by planning to have your baby a few weeks early.

**As with any pregnancy, if you notice any change in your baby's movements you should contact your maternity care team straight away.**

## The Birth

If you have ICP you might be advised to have your baby a little early. This information is just a guide, talk to your medical team about your options and the risks and benefits of each of them for you.

**Mild ICP:** The risk of a stillbirth is the same as it would be for someone without ICP. But this risk could increase if you are still pregnant after your baby's due date. You might be advised to consider a planned birth at 40 weeks.

**Moderate ICP:** The risk of stillbirth is similar to people without ICP. But the risk goes up at the end of pregnancy. You should consider a planned birth between 38 and 39 weeks of pregnancy. Or at the time of the diagnosis if you are already beyond 39 weeks.

**Severe ICP:** In the last weeks of the pregnancy, the risk of still birth is a bit higher than it is for someone without ICP. You will be advised to plan to have your baby early, between 35 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. Or at the time of diagnosis if you are already beyond 36 weeks.

ICP alone does not mean that you must have a Caesarean birth. If you have mild ICP and go into labour before 40 weeks, your risk of still birth is not increased. So unless there are other issues in your pregnancy, you can choose the place of birth that works best for you.

## After your pregnancy

Itching usually stops within a few days of birth, often in the first few hours. ICP should have no long-term effects on your liver or your general health.

**Your GP should have information about your ICP. But if they do not ask about it at your 6 week check, then it is important to bring it up. Your GP should arrange for you to have a liver blood test and a bile acid blood test.**

If your test results are normal, this will confirm that your itching was caused by ICP. You will not need any further treatment. It is possible that you could get ICP again in future pregnancies. If you get pregnant again you should tell your midwife about your ICP at the booking appointment. They should arrange for you to have blood tests.



For more information about  
Hepatitis A and links to support  
visit [liveruk.org/icp](https://liveruk.org/icp)  
or scan the QR code.

