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Medical Reports: *Scratching The Surface*

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Most moms-to-be know that itchiness can be a normal nuisance. But what many don't know is that excessive itchiness may indicate a serious liver problem that can threaten the lives of mom and baby. Tonight, in a special assignment report - Scratching the Surface - health specialist Marilyn Mitzel shows us the warning signs.

(WSVN) -- On the Internet - in books on what to expect - and ob-gyn's tell women that itchiness comes with pregnancy.

Christine: "Everything I read said it could be pretty normal."

Usually it's around the belly as the skin stretches to make room for baby.

Christine Knowles experienced it with Hannah...so she didn't give it much thought...when pregnant with Olivia.

Christine: "In the third trimester, right around 29 30 weeks, I started to have some mild itching."

Planning for Olivia's arrival continued.

Her room was finished.

Family and friends threw a shower.

Christine: "That was a teddy bear we had made for Olivia."

But as her due date grew closer - the itching became unbearable.

Christine: "It kept getting worse and worse and worse to the point where I was up in the wee hours of the night just scratching and itching. I sensed that something horrible was wrong but I couldn't quite put my finger on it."

Christine was diagnosed with intrahepatic (intra- heh-peh -tic) Cholestasis (coal -es - tay-sis) [Intra- ha-pet-ic coal a stay sis-] of pregnancy or I-C-P.

Christine: "I had never heard of it."

The theory - according to perinatologists - hormonal changes cause bile build up in the liver.

Dr. Christine Edwards of Coral Springs Medical Center: "It's very important, if you think you have this condition you need to let your obstetrician know immediately."

Time is of the essence - left untreated - bile can cross into the placenta resulting in life threatening problems for mom and baby.

Dr. Edwards: "Some of the things that we've seen are actually as severe as fetal death."

The predominant symptom - unbearable itching - especially on the palms of the hands and feet.

Christine: "I had bruises all over my thighs the backs of my knees, my inner thighs, from just doing this because I couldn't alleviate the itch."

A simple serum bile acid test can detect I-C-P.

But the results can take two weeks.

Dr. Edwards: "We can't stress just how important it is to make the diagnosis as early as possible."

It's treated with medication.

Mom and baby must be carefully monitored.

Often times - early delivery is necessary.

Dr. Edwards: "The key thing we suggest is that you do not go beyond 38 weeks depending on how serious it is, sometimes as early as 36 weeks."

Christine: "It's a peaceful place to come to, even though you don't like to come here but."

Tragically - by the time Christine got treatment - it was too late to save Oliva.

Christine: "I woke up one morning here on the couch and I was not feeling her move at all."

Christine: "We went in that morning it was Tuesday, April 29th, that's when they did the ultrasound, we found out that she had died, 2:01. We had to deliver that day."

One year later...

Christine is expecting her third daughter - Sofia.

Once again she has I-C-P.

But this time - it was caught early - while there are no guarantees - she's confident Sofia will be all right.

Christine: "If you catch in time, it is treatable and you can have a healthy baby."

Women are more likely to develop I-C-P if someone in your family had it or you're having multiple babies.

But it can happen to anyone.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Related Sites:

<http://www.itchymoms.com/>

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