



CNN Social Desk @CNNSocialDesk · 10 Jun 2015

Not just an itch: @vanessaweisbrod on a potentially serious pregnancy condition cnn.it/1cLFQUx #icpawareness



It's Not Just an Itch

By Eric Weisbrod, CNN Digital Producer

The first 29 weeks of my wife Vanessa's pregnancy were as good as we could have expected. She had no morning sickness, was full of energy and was joyfully planning the arrival of our son. Then, like an unexpected thunderstorm, everything changed.

Vanessa awoke on a Friday morning complaining of itching all over her body. Her feet and hands felt like bugs were crawling all over them and eating her from the inside out. I scratched them at her request, but no matter how hard I scratched, it didn't seem to help. We tried cortisone cream, but that didn't help either.

"I'm itching in places I didn't know I could itch," Vanessa complained. "I felt like I was losing my mind."

As a husband, I felt terrible that Vanessa was already going through being pregnant and dealing with all of the bodily changes that come with having a child. But, now there was something happening to her that we couldn't explain or seemingly help.

Our first thought was that she had eaten something she was allergic to for dinner the night before. She called her OBGYN, Dr. Nicole DeQuattro at Capital Women's Care to find out if she could take Benadryl to stop the itching. Instead of getting a simple yes, the doctor asked Vanessa if she could come in that afternoon for a quick check.

What we thought would be a simple taking of blood pressure and listening to the baby's heartbeat turned into being rushed to the hospital and having what seemed like dozens of tests. After two days, we had a diagnosis: I-C-P. No, it wasn't the rap group Insane Clown Posse. That day Vanessa was diagnosed with Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy (ICP).

"ICP is a liver disorder which occurs during pregnancy, said Dr. Nicole Dequattro of Capital Women's Care." The condition affects the normal flow of bile. With ICP the bile flow begins to slow down and in turn the bile acids build up in the blood. In many women, the build up causes itching that can become quite severe."

According to Dr. DeQuattro, ICP poses several risks that are of great concern. "It is associated with an increased risk of stillbirth, preterm labor, fetal distress, respiratory distress and meconium passage in utero."

When we got home from the hospital, Vanessa whipped out her copy of What to Expect When You're Expecting, hoping to immediately learn everything she possibly could about the condition. What she found was one, very short paragraph giving just a simple definition of the condition. So, she turned to Google and was quickly connected to the nonprofit charity [ICP Care](#), an online resource founded by Donna Benavides to raise awareness of the condition and help women get the proper care to prevent ICP complications.

"I couldn't believe how little information about ICP was in my pregnancy books," Vanessa said. "ICP may not be as common as a complication like gestational diabetes, but I felt like ICP was totally left out of the books! Finding [ICPCare.org](#) and its [Facebook group](#) really saved me. I was able to chat with other women going through the same miserable itching as I was and learn to cope with it."

"Overall, 1 to 2 pregnancies in 1,000 is affected by ICP in the United States with Latina populations at 5.6%." Benavides said. ICP Care helps to connect, support, empower and educate those affected by Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy (ICP). Many women with ICP feel alone and find others are not able to understand the reality of being itchy & risks involved with this high-risk pregnancy condition. With ICP Care itchy moms are united and not alone!

So what causes ICP?

"There is much more research needed to learn about the exact causes of ICP, but researchers currently know of genetic, hormonal and environmental factors," Benavides said. "The causes are likely to be due to a number of different variables. The condition appears within family members from Mother, daughter and sisters. Women with underlying liver conditions, pregnancies with multiples, and those with IVF treatment also appear to have a higher risk of developing Cholestasis of Pregnancy."

Many women aren't as lucky as Vanessa was. Her doctor immediately recognized the symptoms and started her on medication to protect our baby. She was monitored with weekly

sonograms and blood work to check her bile acids and was in constant communication with Dr. DeQuattro.

“I actually felt sort of special,” Vanessa said. “Dr. DeQuattro closely monitored my labs and always made me feel like she was watching over us. As my pregnancy progressed, my liver enzymes crept up, so Dr. DeQuattro made the decision that we needed to induce labor at 37 weeks. When it came time to deliver, she was with us the whole time. I had no doubt that baby Brandon would be born safely.”

But Vanessa’s story isn’t always the norm.

Benavides said “the bile acid blood test to diagnose Cholestasis of Pregnancy can take up to 5 days to receive results, it is vital to react as time is of the essence since 80% of cases appear in the third trimester. The risks to the unborn baby increases making early diagnosis, treatment and delivery essential.”

Vanessa and I know how lucky we are to have a happy and healthy baby boy. Everyday as we watch Brandon grow up, we are thankful that we had access to great medical care and doctors who knew the signs, symptoms and proper treatment for ICP.

The moral of this story. If you know someone who is pregnant and they complain about itching, tell them to call their doctor right away. A simple blood test could save their baby’s life.



IREPORT.CNN.COM

Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy: Not just an itch

The first 29 weeks of my pregnancy were as good as I ever could have...