

# Itching in Pregnancy: What You Need to Know

## Is Itching in Pregnancy Normal?

Mild itching during pregnancy is **common** and can be caused by **hormonal changes, stretching skin, and increased blood flow**. However, **severe or persistent itching** may be a sign of an underlying condition that requires medical attention.

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## Common Causes of Itching in Pregnancy

### 1 ☐ Skin Stretching and Dryness

- As the **belly and breasts grow**, the skin stretches, which can cause **itchiness**.
- **Dry skin** is common and can make itching worse.
- Using a **moisturiser** regularly can help.

### 2 ☐ Pregnancy Hormones

- Increased **oestrogen levels** can cause mild **generalised itching** without a rash.
- This **resolves after birth** and is usually not harmful.

### 3 ☐ Heat Rash

- Increased **body temperature** during pregnancy can lead to a **red, itchy rash**, especially in **skin folds or under the breasts**.
  - **Loose clothing** and **keeping cool** can help.
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## More Serious Causes of Itching in Pregnancy

### 1. Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy (ICP) / Obstetric Cholestasis

A **liver condition** that occurs in pregnancy due to **reduced bile flow**, causing **itching without a rash**. It usually develops in the **third trimester** but can happen earlier.

#### Symptoms:

- ✓ **Severe itching**, often on the **palms of the hands and soles of the feet**, but can affect the whole body.
- ✓ **Itching worse at night**.
- ✓ **Dark urine, pale stools, or yellowing of the skin (jaundice)** in severe cases.

### Why is ICP serious?

ICP can increase the risk of **preterm birth, stillbirth, and foetal distress**, so **early diagnosis and monitoring are important**.

### What to do?

- ✓ **Tell your doctor or midwife immediately** if you have severe itching.
  - ✓ A **blood test** (LFTs & bile acid test) can check your liver function.
  - ✓ **Treatment** may include **ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA)**, early delivery, and **regular foetal monitoring**.
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## 2. Pruritic Urticarial Papules and Plaques of Pregnancy (PUPPP)

A **common skin condition** in pregnancy, usually in the **third trimester**, causing **intensely itchy red patches**.

### Symptoms:

- ✓ **Red, bumpy rash** that starts on the **belly** and spreads to the **thighs, buttocks, and arms**.
- ✓ Often **sparing the face, hands, and feet**.
- ✓ **Very itchy but harmless** for the baby.

### What to do?

- ✓ **Moisturisers, cooling lotions, or antihistamines** (doctor-approved) can help.
  - ✓ **Steroid creams** may be needed for severe cases.
  - ✓ Usually **resolves after birth**.
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## 3. Pemphigoid Gestationis (PG) (Rare)

A **rare autoimmune skin condition** that causes **blistering rashes** and intense itching.

### Symptoms:

- ✓ Starts with **red, itchy patches around the belly button**.
- ✓ **Blisters develop** and can spread to the limbs.
- ✓ Can **increase the risk of preterm birth** and affect the baby's skin for a short time after birth.


### What to do?

- ✓ **Urgent dermatology referral is needed**.
  - ✓ **Steroid creams or tablets** may be required.
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# How to Relieve Itching During Pregnancy

- ✓ **Moisturise** regularly to keep skin hydrated.
  - ✓ **Wear loose cotton clothing** to prevent irritation.
  - ✓ **Avoid hot showers and harsh soaps** that can dry out the skin.
  - ✓ **Use cool compresses** to soothe itchy areas.
  - ✓ **Talk to your doctor** before taking antihistamines or using steroid creams.
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## When to Seek Medical Help

-  **Call your doctor or midwife immediately if you have:**
- ! **Severe itching that is worse at night** (especially on hands & feet).
  - ! **Jaundice (yellow skin or eyes), dark urine, or pale stools.**
  - ! **A widespread rash or blisters.**
  - ! **Itching that is interfering with your sleep or daily life.**
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## Final Thoughts

While mild itching is **normal in pregnancy**, severe or persistent itching **can be a sign of a more serious condition** like **cholestasis**. Always **speak to your healthcare provider** if you are concerned. **Early diagnosis and treatment can help keep you and your baby safe.**

For more information, visit [RANZCOG](https://www.ranzcog.org.au) or speak to your doctor or midwife.

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