

Factsheet - Induction of labour for Obstetric Cholestasis (Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy)

Key facts:

Here's a summary of evidence-based UK data, individual risk may vary.

What is obstetric cholestasis?

This is a liver condition in pregnancy which causes itching, usually on hands and feet, through build-up of bile acids in the blood. It affects around 7 in 1000 (0.7%) pregnancies in the UK, and up to 15 per 1000 (1.5%) in some ethnic groups.

Your Choices

- ✓ Accept induction or plan caesarean birth.
- ✓ Adopt a wait and see approach with close monitoring.
- ✓ Say no to induction, if you prefer to wait, you'll be offered extra checks.
- 💡 Talk to your midwife or doctor, they'll help you decide what's best for you and your baby.

Why does it matter?

Most people with cholestasis feel well apart from itching. In severe cases, there is a higher chance of:

- Stillbirth if bile acid levels in your blood are very high (over 100 $\mu\text{mol/L}$). If your levels are lower, the chance is similar to that in a typical pregnancy.
- Your baby may be born early, either naturally or through induction.
- Your baby might pass their first poo (meconium) into the amniotic fluid before or during labour.
- Your baby may show signs of stress during monitoring, possibly because of the effects from bile acids on their heart rhythm.

Stillbirth in Obstetric Cholestasis by Bile Acid Level and Gestation

Here's a summary of evidence-based UK data, individual risk may vary.

Bile Acid Level	Gestation	Stillbirth	Recommended Action
<40 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (Mild ICP)	Up to 40 weeks	Similar to general population (1.3 per 1000 births)	Continue monitoring; consider birth by 40 weeks
40–99 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (Moderate ICP)	After 38–39 weeks	Slightly increased chance (no significant rise until after 39 weeks)	Consider induction at 38–39 weeks
≥ 100 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (Severe ICP)	After 35–36 weeks	Significantly increased chance (3–5 per 100 births)	Recommend induction at 35–36 weeks

What are the alternatives?

If you choose to wait longer, you'll be offered:

- Weekly blood tests
- Monitoring of baby's heart rate
- A plan for induction if bile acids rise or symptoms worsen

Quick Summary

- Cholestasis causes itching and raises bile acids.
- Most babies are born healthy, but stillbirth incidence increases with higher bile acid levels.
- Induction is usually offered around 37–38 weeks.
- You can choose to wait, start labour early, or discuss other options

What Happens if you decide not to be induced?

If your preference deviates from recommended care, you will be offered an appointment to discuss this further with your obstetrician who will discuss your options and any extra support and monitoring you will need.

Need Help or Have Questions?

Speak to your midwife or call Triage: 01772 524495

Here's a practical BRAIN Decision Tool. It is designed to clarify thought processes and support informed decision making.

How to Use It:

Write down your thoughts under each heading.

Discuss them with your midwife or healthcare team.

Use this as a guide, not a rule - your choice matters.

Some examples have been added to the table to help you get started.

B - What are the potential benefits of induction for me and my baby?

Examples:

May reduce chance of stillbirth.

Planned timing for birth.

R – What are the possible risks or downsides?

Examples:

Longer labour process.

Increased chance of interventions (e.g., assisted birth).

Possible discomfort from induction methods.

Longer stay in hospital

A – What other alternatives do I have?	<i>Examples: Wait for labour to start naturally. Extra monitoring.</i>
I – What does my intuition tell me?	
N – What happens if I do nothing right now?	