

'My skin was unbearable...I scratched until I bled'

Mum warns pregnancy itch may be sign of severe illness

By Dawn Thompson

WHEN mother-to-be Libby McAdam started to feel a slight itch, she dismissed it as a natural part of her pregnancy.

But as it became more and more unbearable, she resorted to increasingly desperate measures to try to ease the irritation.

She took cold showers, put her hands in the freezer to numb them, and even used the metal bristles of a hairbrush to scratch herself – scraping at her skin until it bled.

Mrs McAdam became unable to sleep or work because of the incessant itching – the result of a little-known liver disorder which could have killed her unborn baby.

Now, she has joined Call the Midwife star Helen George in helping to raise awareness of the condition, intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy (ICP).

It comes amid warnings from charity ICP Support that people in Scotland are 'lagging behind' the rest of the UK when it comes to knowledge of the disorder.

Mrs McAdam, 32, said: 'It's torture. I was absolutely desperate. It's a really deep, burning itch.'

'Doctors warned my baby could be stillborn, which was terrifying.'

'I ended up unable to work and I was depressed. It's really important people know about it.'

ICP affects about 5,500 women in the UK every year – 0.7 per cent of all pregnancies. It occurs when the flow of bile, produced by the liver, slows down and bile acid builds up and flows into the blood stream – potentially stopping the baby's heart from beating.

Finance manager Mrs McAdam, from Gorebridge, Midlothian, was



Raising awareness: Libby and Barry McAdam with Brodie and Leigh

already suffering from hyperemesis gravidarum – excessive nausea and vomiting – when she first started itching at 29 weeks.

She suffered ICP while pregnant with daughter Leigh, now three, and son Brodie, now one. She said:

'I was in freezing cold showers hourly'

'It was uncomfortable – but itching is common in pregnancy, so I didn't think twice about it.'

'But at about 32 weeks, I went to bed and experienced the most horrendous, deep, burning itch.'

She added: 'I would scratch so badly I was bleeding. I would bite the rubber bits off a hairbrush to

get to the harsh metal bristles and scrape those all over my body.'

'I was in freezing cold showers hourly during the night just trying to get the heat to go away. I would keep my hands in the freezer. But nothing worked.'

Mrs McAdam, who is married to electronics engineer Barry, 39, was closely monitored by Borders General Hospital. Treatment included tablets to reduce bile acids and antihistamines.

ICP Support founder Jenny Chambers fears Scotland is trailing the rest of the UK when it comes to knowledge and management of the condition.

She said: 'Libby had great care in her pregnancy but we know, because they tell us, that not all women in Scotland do. It is vital that health professionals know

about ICP and how to manage it so any risk of stillbirth is reduced.'

Actress Helen George – who plays Trixie Franklin in Call the Midwife – told The Mail on Sunday last month about her battle with ICP while pregnant with daughter Wren Ivy. The 33-year-old – a patron for ICP Support – said: 'It can drive women absolutely crazy and to suicide in some cases. It's a horrific illness.'

The Scottish Government said all midwives and obstetricians were trained to spot symptoms of ICP.

A spokesman said: 'Women are provided with advice on a range of potential complications of pregnancy, including obstetric cholestasis, in Ready Steady Baby, which is given to every pregnant woman at their booking appointment with a midwife.'

■ Visit www.icpsupport.org.

Celebrity sufferer:
Call The Midwife star Helen George has told of her agony with ICP while pregnant

