

# 'My skin started itching... then I lost my baby'

**A**fter suffering a miscarriage, Emily Harvey was thrilled when she and

husband Tom conceived again. They nicknamed their bump "Squiggle".

But shortly before her due date, Emily experienced severe itching on her hands and feet. Days later she was told the worst news imaginable – her baby's heartbeat had stopped.

As Emily tried to deal with her grief – and went through the trauma of giving birth to her stillborn child – she found she'd developed a pregnancy-related liver condition called ICP that had caused baby Ollie's tragic death. Here, Emily, 36, tells new! how she's coping with her loss...

**At 38 weeks pregnant, Emily Harvey was told the devastating news that her baby had died in her womb...**

As I checked and rechecked my hospital bag, I felt a wave of excitement. "Not long now," I thought, patting my rounded belly. I'd passed the 37-week stage, so I was considered full-term. Now it was just a case of giving birth, then my husband Tom and I would have the baby of our dreams.

Just two weeks after getting together with Tom, 35, in May 2003, I knew he was the man for me. He was charming, sensitive and funny. We married in August 2008 and I swapped my career in marketing for teaching.

When I fell pregnant we were ecstatic, only to be crushed when I suffered a miscarriage after three months. "It's just one of those things," the doctor said.

Happily, I got pregnant again in early 2013, but then I saw spots of blood. "Come on, Squiggle, fight for it!" I urged. I have no idea where the nickname came from,

but it stuck. And to my relief, the doctor said everything was going fine. I was so pleased, I didn't even mind the morning sickness. Tom and I turned our spare bedroom into a nursery with a colourful carpet. We attended parenting classes and read every book going. "Squiggle's the size of an aubergine!" I told Tom at six months.

At 37 weeks, I got food poisoning. I got over the sickness, but days later I was still dehydrated. What's more, the skin on my palms and the soles of my feet had started to itch alarmingly. Unconcerned, my GP said it was probably just dermatitis – a skin inflammation.

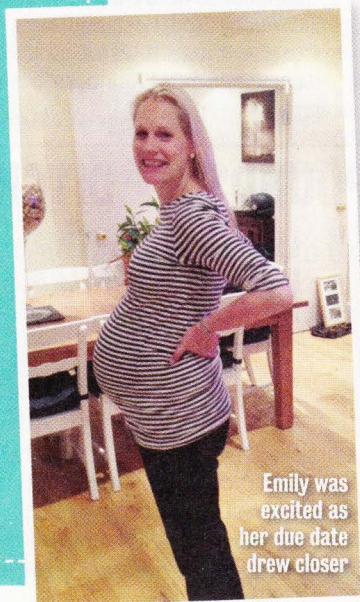
But the itching was excruciating. It was as if I'd been stung by mosquitos and at night I was thrashing around in bed. I even tried numbing my hands and feet in cold water to get some relief.

## NO MOVEMENT

Days later, I woke up having contractions, but they weren't getting more frequent so I figured

they were Braxton Hicks – practice contractions. I carried on with my day, seeing friends and doing last-minute errands while my hands were still baby-free.

But that evening, when I sat down, I realised I hadn't felt the baby move for a while. Tom and I prodded my bump but there was no movement. I'd read that babies are less active when labour



Emily was excited as her due date drew closer

## WHAT IS ICP?

- ICP (intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy, also known as obstetric cholestasis or OC) is a liver disorder that affects 1 in 140 pregnant women each year in the UK.
- The main symptom is itching, usually of the hands and feet, that can be mild or severe, constant or intermittent.
- A bile acid test is thought to be the most specific test for ICP, and drugs are available to help improve liver function and ease itching.
- ICP is associated with an increased risk of spontaneous premature birth, foetal distress and stillbirth. Most hospitals monitor women with ICP and deliver the babies early to minimise risk.

For more info visit [www.icpsupport.org](http://www.icpsupport.org)

Emily and Tom would love to have another baby



Emily said having pictures taken with Ollie felt "surreal"

Emily took prints of Ollie's tiny hand



midwife were all crying. We decided to name him Oliver – Ollie. As I glanced down, he looked like he was sleeping. "He's perfect," I sobbed. "Why did he have to die?" When the midwife suggested we take some photos, I recoiled, but she explained many parents find it a comfort further down the line.

Posing for pictures was an awkward, surreal moment. I didn't know where to look. We took prints of Ollie's tiny hands and feet and eventually returned him to his cot. I lay down to sleep, but when I closed my eyes the horror engulfed me.

In the days after Ollie's death, my blood test results came back. They showed that I'd developed a pregnancy-related condition called intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy (ICP) that had caused the itching I'd experienced. It affects the liver and can cause stillbirths.

When I left hospital four days later, I felt like I was underwater. Back home I couldn't eat and relied on sleeping pills to escape my grief.

## SAYING GOODBYE

Before Ollie's funeral, we read him a story as if it was bedtime. Putting him to sleep felt fractionally less awful than saying goodbye. Tom and I read a eulogy, telling our baby how special and loved he was. Seeing his tiny coffin was heartbreaking.

We went to stay in the countryside and shut ourselves off from the world. Afterwards we got a puppy – Baloo. I needed something to nurture and he got me through my darkest days. Sometimes the grief hit me hard, but I found a group, ICP Support, and it helped so much.

On October 12, which would have been Ollie's first birthday, our families gathered to scatter his ashes by an oak tree. But not an hour goes by that I don't think about him.

Tom and I would love to have another baby. If it happens I'll be considered a high-risk pregnancy, but ICP can be managed as long as it's diagnosed. Now I'm determined to spread the word so other women don't suffer the agony of losing their child.

CAROLINE BENJAMIN

Visit [www.justgiving.com/icp-for-oliver](http://www.justgiving.com/icp-for-oliver) to raise awareness and funds for ICP Support

## 'WE WERE GIVEN A SUITE AWAY FROM THE MATERNITY WARD. TOM KEPT BURSTING INTO TEARS BUT I WAS IN DENIAL'

starts so I wasn't worried, but when we called the hospital as a precaution, a midwife said, "Come in for a scan and we'll reassure you."

"Worst case scenario you'll be in labour a bit early," said Tom. So, excitedly, we grabbed our bag and headed to the hospital.

Once there, the midwife strapped a heartbeat monitor around my tummy. But she couldn't find a heartbeat. "What's going on?" I asked, as she started another scan. My heart was racing, but I wouldn't let myself believe something was wrong.

It was only when the midwife went to call a doctor that we had the gut-wrenching realisation it was going to be bad news. We could hear rushing outside the cubicle. We didn't realise it at the time, but the other cubicles were being cleared. The medics were starting the procedure for dealing with a dead child.

Two doctors came in and did further ultrasounds. Then one of them finally spoke. "I'm so very sorry, there's no heartbeat," he said. "Your baby's gone."

The shock overwhelmed me. I couldn't believe my baby had died before he was born. I'd never hear his first cry or feel his tiny hand clench around my little finger. The horror was unimaginable, but I was too numb to cry.

As if that news wasn't bad enough, the doctor explained I'd have to deliver my baby naturally, saying the risk of infection was too high with a caesarean. They gave me drugs to induce labour, then we went home to wait.

Tom called our families and I watched mindless drivel on TV before falling asleep in his arms. Hours later I woke up having contractions every three minutes, so Tom took me back to hospital, where we were given a suite away from the maternity ward. Tom kept bursting into tears, but I was in denial. In the end, doctors delivered my baby using forceps.

"It's a boy," a doctor said. And then I broke down in tears. I had a son, but I wouldn't get to see him grow up. After the nurses dressed him, he was brought to us in a cot. Tom and I and the