



Me with baby Penny, Phoebe and Richard

Starting from **SCRATCH!**

ITCHING

for a baby!



Phoebe was so tiny!

When **Claire** discovered she was pregnant, she never expected such an extreme reaction...

Clutching my tummy, I tried to ride out the nausea hitting me in waves. 'Oh, no, not now,' I groaned, sitting behind the desk at the hotel where I worked as a receptionist. With a long line of impatient guests waiting to be checked out, the last thing I needed was a bout of morning sickness!

Apologising, I rushed to the kitchen to throw up in the sink. I'd been horribly sick ever since I'd fallen pregnant.

But me and my fiancé, Richard Horman, 30, were delighted about our impending arrival.

Together for four years, we'd talked about starting a family since he'd popped the question on our first anniversary.

'I've always wanted three kids,' I grinned, and luckily Richard, a shift manager, was just as keen!

Sadly, my first pregnancy ended in miscarriage at 13 weeks.

I'd always wanted to be a mum

So, now, six months on, I felt lucky to be expecting again. *If only I could stop chucking up!*

'It's just a bad case of morning sickness,' said my mum, Janet McCarthy, 52, who lived around the corner from me.

At my 12-week scan, a midwife also reassured me it was totally normal to suffer with sickness, especially in the first trimester.

'It shows that the hormones are kicking in!' she chuckled, convincing me it was a good sign.

But that wasn't much consolation when I was dashing to the bathroom - not just in the morning, but all day long.

And now, in June 2011, as I struggled to get through a day's work, I was at my wits' end.

'I thought I was supposed to be glowing!' I joked to Mum. Thankfully, at 20 weeks, my sickness began to subside.

Only it was replaced with something much worse...

Constant, unbearable itching! 'What is going on?' I winced.

Day and night, a burning sensation ravaged my whole body as I scratched and scratched, desperate to relieve the itch.

It got so bad that Richard would grab my hands, begging me to stop!

Baths, calamine lotion... nothing seemed to ease it.

Some nights, the desire to



The symptoms were unbearable!

scratch was so bad I barely slept. One morning, at 30 weeks gone, I couldn't cope any more. I was in agony, and my arms and legs were scratched and bleeding.

'Come to hospital,' my midwife advised. A few days later, I was given a scan and blood test at Royal Preston Hospital.

Two days later, a consultant called me and Richard in.

'We can explain your itching

My body was burning up!

and sickness,' he said, diagnosing me with something called intrahepatic cholestasis, or ICP.

The condition, which occurs during pregnancy, is a liver disorder affecting one in 140 women in the UK each year.

It occurs when the liver can't cope with the rise in pregnancy hormones and affects its ability to transport important bile acids.

It also meant a risk of premature birth and stillbirth.

Overwhelmed and confused, we tried to take in the news.

'As long as the baby's OK,' I said, tearfully.

The consultant put me on medication to ease the itching and said I'd have to go to hospital

three times a week to be monitored.

But it was a constant worry. I was petrified something was going to happen to our little one.

Three weeks later, when I went in for a scan, the consultant was concerned because our baby's growth had slowed.

'We'll have to induce you in a week's time,' he announced.

With our baby due to arrive four weeks early, me and Richard were thrown into a mad panic, buying last-minute baby stuff.

Then, on Boxing Day 2011, I was induced at Royal Preston Hospital, where, after a 26-hour labour, I gave birth to a little girl.

Hearing her wail for the first time was the best feeling ever.

Although she was a tiny 4lb 8oz, our little Phoebe - as we called her - was perfectly healthy.

Thankfully, after the birth, my symptoms disappeared.

Two years on, I've just had another baby, Penny, who was also born early, just like her big sister, weighing

3lb 14oz.

Although I suffered the same symptoms as last time, I was put on medication to control my ICP straight away.

I also found an ICP support group, which was a massive help.

There's a 50/50 chance that I'll develop ICP if I fall pregnant again.

Now we've got our perfect little family, I'm not sure that's a risk I want to take. Although I'd love a third child, that's an itch I'm not willing to scratch!

Claire Carter, 30, Preston, Lancashire

For more information and support, visit www.icpsupport.org

As told to Andrea Leebody (features@realpeoplemag.co.uk)

