produced in the liver and stored in the gall bladder. In ICP patients, bile flow is impaired, causing bile levels to increase in the blood. Some patients experience jaundice and internal pain that makes the diagnosis more obvious. But for most, itching is the only symptom.

“It’s peculiar itching in unusual places, like the palms of the hands, tips of the ears and bottoms of the feet,” said Dr. Salih Yasin, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Miami.

Benavides put it more bluntly: “You feel like you’re losing your mind.”

Her blood test revealed high levels of bile acid. To reduce the risk of stillbirth, her obstetrician scheduled her for labor induction at 38 weeks. Benavides never made it that far; her baby was stillborn at 36 weeks.

“I lost my son because I was diagnosed late and not given medication,” she said.

For her second pregnancy, Benavides went to an obstetrician specializing in high-risk pregnancies. She knew that with her history of ICP, she was at high risk for developing it again. When a blood test confirmed the disorder, she was put on the drug Actigall to reduce the risk of stillbirth.

“It’s completely safe in pregnancy and it is cheap,” Yasin said of the drug. “It’s quite effective.”

Even with medication controlling bile acids, ICP patients are advised to delivery early, which is exactly what Benavides’ specialist ordered.

This time, her baby was born healthy. Benevides went on to have another, while once again battling ICP. Her two sons are now 7 and 8 years old. Like most former ICP patients, Benevides has had no hint of liver problems since her last pregnancy.

To help other mothers-to-be with ICP get treated soon enough to protect their pregnancies, Benavides in 2012 established the non-profit organization ICP Care. The web-based service enables ICP patients to learn about the disorder and support each other on line. Benevides estimates 1,000 women, including some from as far away as Australia, share information via the website.

“Medicine and early delivery are key,” Benevides said. “Those two cut the risk [of stillbirth] to about 1 percent.”

Her message to expectant mothers with an unusual itch is to insist on blood testing for bile acids, even if an earlier test was negative.

“If you continue to itch,” she said, “it’s vital to be retested. It’s a matter of being persistent.”

To learn more about ICP, visit icpcare.org. The site has a link to a Facebook support group.