

## A Problematic Pregnancy Rash

Stanley Wine, MD, FRCPC

This 28-year-old woman had a previous uneventful pregnancy. At 38 weeks in her second pregnancy, a blotchy, itchy rash began on her abdomen and spread to her extremities (Figure 1). Three days after delivery, clustered blisters appeared on her waist, thighs, and legs (Figure 2). The pruritis was intense.

### What is your Diagnosis?

Pemphigoid gestationis (PG), often improperly called herpes gestationis, is a rare pruritic eruption of pregnancy. It usually appears late in pregnancy with intensely pruritic urticarial lesions of the midriff, spreading to the extremities with evolving tense blisters. Lesions spare the face, palms, and soles.

Flares during, or shortly after, delivery can be dramatic with tense blisters, although there can be a considerable variation in the severity noted.

There is a risk of blistering during subsequent pregnancies, menstruation, and restarting on oral contraceptives.

PG can be easily confused with pruritic urticarial papules and plaques of pregnancy (PUPPP). Both begin on the abdomen with pruritis late in pregnancy. PUPPP may rarely show microvesicles but not the size, severity, the amount of eosinophils noted on PG biopsy. Further confirmation can be done by direct immunofluorescence studies (C3 component). While PUPPP usually requires only symptomatic treatment (if at all) with topical agents and antihistamines, PG usually needs a sustained course of oral steroids, much like that needed for bullous pemphigoid, with a slow tapering of the dose over weeks to months.

As there is an increased incidence of Graves' disease in such patients, antithyroid antibodies should be obtained, even if the results of a TSH test are normal.



Figure 1: Blotchy, Itchy Rash 38 Weeks into a Second Pregnancy



Figure 2: Clustered Blisters Three Days After Delivery

Stanley Wine, MD, FRCPC, is a Dermatologist in North York, Ontario.

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