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Jaundice in Newborns

A Comprehensive Guide

Definition

- Jaundice means your baby's skin or eyes look yellow.
- It happens when a yellow substance called **bilirubin** builds up in the body.
- Bilirubin comes from the breakdown of red blood cells. Our bodies are always breaking down red blood cells. When in the womb, the bilirubin is removed by the placenta. After birth, the baby's liver takes over the job of removing bilirubin, but a newborn's liver may be too immature to do this quickly, which is why we see jaundice.
- Common in 6/10 full term newborns and 8/10 premature babies.
- Usually mild and goes away without treatment.

Overview

- Jaundice usually shows up 2-4 days after birth.
- It starts on the face and can move to the chest, belly, arms, and legs. It typically resolves in the reverse direction, from belly up to face.
- Mild jaundice is common and usually clears by 1 to 2 weeks.
- Your baby's bilirubin level may be checked before leaving the hospital, and if needed, at your first few well check visits
- In some cases, jaundice needs treatment like phototherapy (light therapy).
- Very high levels of bilirubin can be dangerous, but this is rare, and we will be watching levels closely, so you don't need to worry.
- Frequent feeding helps the baby pass more stool and lower bilirubin.

Breastfeeding and Jaundice

- Breastfed baby jaundice can be more noticeable, especially if they aren't getting enough milk.
- Feed every 2 to 3 hours during the day and night and offer both breasts each feeding.
- Signs of good feeding include hearing swallows and having 6 or more wet diapers by day 5.
- If your baby is too sleepy or not feeding well, ask for help from your provider or one of our lactation counselors.
- Breast milk jaundice may last several weeks, but it's usually harmless. You don't need to stop breastfeeding.

Bottle Feeding and Jaundice

- Formula-fed babies often have less jaundice because they often take in more volume early on.
- Feed every 2 to 3 hours or whenever your baby shows hunger cues.
- Don't let more than 4 hours go between feedings.
- Watch for at least 6 wet diapers a day and regular stooling.
- Let your provider know if your baby is sleepy or feeding poorly.

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Reference: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), HealthyChildren.org

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Infrequent Stooling Means Your Baby Needs More Milk

- Babies get rid of bilirubin through stooling.
- If your baby isn't pooping often, they may not be getting enough milk.
- In the first 4 days, babies should stool at least once a day, and by day 5, at least 3 times a day.
- Stools should turn from black (meconium) to green to yellow.
- Yellow, seedy stools are a good sign in breastfed babies.
- If stooling is slow to increase, talk with your baby's provider or one of our lactation counselors.

What to Expect

- Most newborn jaundice goes away on its own.
- If your baby needs treatment, it usually works quickly. The treatment is not painful and there are no side effects.
- Babies may get treated in the hospital or at home with special lights. If these are needed once you are home, we will help get supplies to your house.
- You should keep feeding often—this helps bring bilirubin levels down.
- Your baby's provider may check bilirubin with a blood test for the first few visits.
- You may need to return for a recheck in the first few days after going home.
- If you're ever worried about your baby's feeding, stooling, or yellow coloring, call your provider.
- Try not to worry about the jaundice itself, we are monitoring your baby closely and will guide you every step of the way!

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