



Q: What is jaundice?

A: Jaundice is the yellow color seen in the skin of many newborns. It happens when a chemical called bilirubin builds up in the baby's blood. Jaundice can occur in babies of any race or color.

Q: Why is jaundice common in newborns?

A: Everyone's blood contains bilirubin, which is removed by the liver. Before birth, the mother's liver does this for the baby. Most babies develop jaundice in the first few days after birth because it takes a few days for the baby's liver to get better at removing bilirubin.

Q: How can I tell if my baby is jaundiced?

A: The skin of a baby with jaundice usually appears yellow. The best way to see jaundice is in good light, such as daylight or under fluorescent lights. Jaundice usually appears first in the face and then moves to the chest, abdomen, arms, and legs as the bilirubin level increases. The whites of the eyes may also be yellow. Jaundice may be harder to see in babies with darker skin color.

Q: Can jaundice hurt my baby?

A: Most infants have mild jaundice that is harmless, but in unusual situations the bilirubin level can get very high and might cause brain damage. This is why newborns should be checked carefully for jaundice and treated to prevent a high bilirubin level.

Q: How should my baby be checked for jaundice?

A: If your baby looks jaundiced in the first few days after birth, your midwife may use a skin test to check your baby's bilirubin level. A bilirubin level is always needed if jaundice develops before the baby is 24 hours old. Whether a test is needed after that depends on the baby's age, the amount of jaundice, and whether the baby has other factors that make jaundice more likely or harder to see.

Q: Does breastfeeding affect jaundice?

A: Jaundice is more common in babies who are breastfed than babies who are formula-fed, but this occurs mainly in infants who are not nursing well. If you are breastfeeding, you should nurse your baby at least 8 to 12 times a day for the first few days. This will help you produce enough milk and will help to keep the baby's bilirubin level down. If you are having trouble breastfeeding, ask your midwife for help. Breast milk is the ideal food for your baby.



Q: When should my newborn get checked for jaundice?

A: It is important for your baby to be seen by your midwife when the baby is between 3 and 5 days old, because this is usually when a baby's bilirubin level is highest.

Q: Which babies require more attention for jaundice?

A: Some babies have a greater risk for high levels of bilirubin and may need to be seen sooner. Ask your midwife if your baby has any of the following:

- Early birth (more than 2 weeks before the due date)
- Jaundice in the first 24 hours after birth
- Breastfeeding that is not going well
- A parent or brother or sister who had high bilirubin and received light therapy

Q: When should I call my midwife?

A: Call your midwife if:

- Your baby's skin turns more yellow.
- Your baby's abdomen, arms, or legs are yellow.
- The whites of your baby's eyes are yellow.
- Your baby is jaundiced and is hard to wake, fussy, or not nursing or taking formula well.

Q: How is harmful jaundice prevented?

A: Most jaundice requires no treatment. When treatment is necessary, placing your baby under special lights while he or she is undressed will lower the bilirubin level. Depending on your baby's bilirubin level, this can be done in the hospital or at home.

Q: When does jaundice go away?

A: In breastfed infants, jaundice often lasts for more than 2 to 3 weeks. If your baby is jaundiced for more than 3 weeks, see your baby's doctor.