

# About Jaundice And Your Newborn Baby

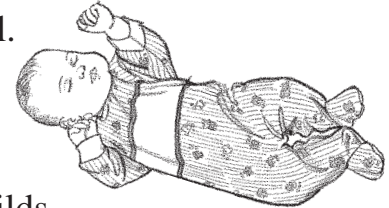


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## **Congratulations on the birth of your new baby!**

We want your baby to be safe and healthy, so before you leave the hospital we want to:

- Check your baby for jaundice (yellow skin).
- Help you to be sure that your baby is breastfeeding well.



## **Why does my baby look yellow?**

A newborn baby whose skin turns a yellow color has jaundice.

This yellow color is caused when a chemical called bilirubin builds up in the baby's blood. Jaundice can happen in babies of any race or color.

## **Why do so many newborn babies have jaundice?**

Everyone's blood has bilirubin in it. Usually, the person's liver gets rid of the bilirubin. Before a baby is born, the mother's liver gets rid of the baby's bilirubin. After the baby is born, it may take a few days for the baby's liver to do a good job of getting rid of the bilirubin. This is why many newborn babies have jaundice.

## **How will I know if my baby has jaundice?**

If your baby has jaundice, the skin will look yellow. You can see this best in good light, such as daylight or under fluorescent lights. Usually, you can first see the yellow color in your baby's face. It then spreads to the baby's chest, abdomen (belly), arms and legs as there is more bilirubin in the blood. The whites of your baby's eyes may also get yellow. If your baby has a dark skin, it may be harder to tell if the baby has jaundice.

## **Can jaundice hurt my baby?**

If your baby just has a mild case of jaundice, this will not hurt your baby. Sometimes, if the bilirubin level in the baby's blood gets very high, it can cause brain problems for the baby. This is why it is important for your baby to be checked carefully for jaundice, and have your baby treated to keep the bilirubin level from getting high.

## **How will my baby be checked for jaundice?**

If your baby looks jaundiced in the first few days after birth, your health care provider may do a skin or blood test to check the bilirubin level of the baby's blood. Bilirubin blood levels are always checked on babies who have jaundice before they are 24 hours old .

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## Does it make any difference whether I breastfeed or bottlefeed my baby?

Jaundice is more common in babies who are breastfeeding but not nursing well. If you are breastfeeding, you should nurse your baby at least 8 - 12 times a day for the first few days. This will help you make enough milk, and keep the baby's bilirubin level low. If you are having trouble breastfeeding, ask your health care provider for help.

**Breast milk is the very best food for your baby.**



## Which babies are most likely to have jaundice?

Babies who are most likely to have jaundice are those who:

- Start turning yellow before they are 24 hours old.
- Are not breastfeeding well.
- Are born early (more than 2 weeks before the due date).
- Have a high bilirubin level before going home from the hospital.
- Have a lot of bruising and bleeding under the scalp from being born.
- Who have a Mom, Dad, brother or sister who had high bilirubin and had light therapy when they were newborn.



## How is jaundice treated?

A baby whose bilirubin level is low does not need any treatment. If the bilirubin level is high and the baby needs treatment, the naked baby will be put under special lights (light therapy). This is so the special lights can reach all of the baby's skin. Your health care provider will decide if the light therapy needs to be done in the hospital or can be done at home. If your baby has a high bilirubin level, treatment will be started before the level gets high enough to cause brain problems. Light therapy can help keep the baby from the harm caused by a high bilirubin level.

## When will the jaundice go away?

Jaundice usually lasts for about 2 - 3 weeks in babies who are breastfed. Jaundice usually clears up in less than 2 weeks in babies who are formula-fed. If your baby's jaundice lasts for more than 3 weeks, call your baby's health care provider.

## When should I call my baby's health care provider?

- Your baby's skin gets more yellow.
- Your baby's abdomen (belly), arms or legs become yellow.
- The whites of your baby's eyes become yellow.
- Your baby has jaundice, and is hard to wake, fussy or not nursing or taking formula well.

