

# Jaundice and Your Newborn

For new parents, the first weeks after your baby is born are filled with joy. But this also a time when you are paying close attention to your baby's health. You may notice a yellow tint in your baby's skin. Jaundice is a common health concern for newborns. This condition is caused by high levels of a substance called "Bilirubin" in the blood.

Jaundice usually appears on the second or third day after birth, peaks and then goes away, disappearing before the end of the second week. But if your baby has serious jaundice and doesn't get treatment quickly, it can lead to brain damage. If you notice your baby looks yellow or tan, call your baby's pediatrician. Your doctor may order a skin or blood test to check your baby's Bilirubin level.

Jaundice may be missed in babies with a darker or olive skin complexion. Checking their gums and inner lips may detect jaundice. If there is any doubt, a bilirubin test should be done. To ensure your baby is safe from a severe form of jaundice called Kernicterus, your doctor will check your baby's health before she goes home from the hospital.

Most cases are mild, but if the bilirubin levels are high, the child may be treated with phototherapy. Your baby will be placed under special lights or laid on or wrapped in a small blanket which has fiber optic lights in it. This is often done in the hospital but may be done at home. Jaundice usually goes away after two weeks, but you should call your doctor 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 up, fussy or not feeding well.

When jaundice is not serious, you can take steps to help lower the levels of bilirubin. Make sure your baby is getting plenty to eat. If you're breastfeeding, increase how often you feed your baby. Nurse your baby every 1 ½ to 2 hours during the day. Don't let your baby sleep more than four hours at night without a feeding.

If you're bottle feeding, try to feed your baby every 2 to 3 hours during the day. Regular feeding will help carry bilirubin out of the body. This is important for bringing down the bilirubin level. The key to treating jaundice is early detection. If you think your baby has jaundice call your baby's doctor and schedule a visit right away to keep your baby healthy.