



# Jaundice (Hyperbilirubinemia)

Jaundice (yellow skin) is a common condition of healthy full term babies and even more common in sick or premature infants. Bilirubin is the substance that causes the yellow color. It is made by the body as red blood cells break down and are used again by the body. The newborn liver is not as good at removing bilirubin from the blood as it will be in several weeks. Bilirubin is also reabsorbed from the intestine of babies before it can be passed out in the stool. The combination of these conditions, unique in newborns, makes jaundice a temporary occurrence in most babies.

Bilirubin levels are measured by a blood test. Mild to moderate levels of jaundice are not dangerous and do not require treatment. The level at which jaundice becomes concerning depends on the age and weight of the infant, and if the baby has any other medical conditions.

Phototherapy (bili-lights) may be used to treat jaundice. The baby's eyes will be covered while under phototherapy to protect them from the lights. More frequent feeding of the breast milk or formula may also be

recommended (feeding the baby extra water does not help clear up jaundice). Blood tests will be done to check on the bilirubin levels, which generally decreases in the first day or two of light treatment.

Rarely, the bilirubin level increases rapidly, is too high, or does not respond to phototherapy (usually some other condition is present, like different blood types in mother and baby). In these cases a special procedure called an exchange blood transfusion may be necessary to remove the excess bilirubin and give the baby fresh blood. If this is needed, your doctor will give you more details.

After the bili-lights are stopped, the bilirubin may go up slightly but usually not to the previous level. If you think your baby looks more yellow after discharge from the hospital, discuss your concerns with your baby's doctor.

Remember, jaundice is very common and rarely dangerous. It usually is more of an inconvenience than a problem.