

Jaundiced Newborn

Definition

- Jaundice means the skin has turned a yellow color.
- Bilirubin is the pigment that turns the skin yellow.
- The liver normally gets rid of bilirubin. But at birth, the liver may be immature.
- Half of babies have some jaundice. Usually, it is mild and doesn't need any treatment.

Health Information

Judging Jaundice:

- Jaundice starts on the face and moves downward. Try to determine where it stops.
- View your baby unclothed in natural light near a window.
- Press on the skin with a finger to remove the normal skin tone.
- Then try to look if the skin is yellow before the pink color returns.
- Move down the body, doing the same. Try to look where the yellow color stops.
- Jaundice that only involves the face is always harmless. As it involves the chest, the level is going up. If it involves the stomach, arms or legs, the bilirubin needs to be checked. It also needs to be checked if the white of the eyes (sclera) turns yellow.

Causes of Jaundice

Physiological Jaundice (50% of newborns)

- Onset 2 to 3 days of age
- Peaks day 4 to 5, then improves
- Disappears 1 to 2 weeks of age

Breastfeeding or Malnutrition Jaundice (5 to 10% of newborns)

- Due to inadequate intake of breastmilk
- Pattern similar to physiological type
- Also, causes poor weight gain
- Goes away when baby gets enough milk

Breastmilk Jaundice (10% of newborns)

- Due to substance in breastmilk which blocks removal of bilirubin
- Breastmilk intake and weight gain are normal
- Onset 4 to 7 days of age
- Lasts 3 to 12 weeks
- Not harmful

Rh and ABO Blood Group Mismatch (Rare)

- Onset during first 24 hours of life
- Can reach harmful levels

Care Advice

1. **Overview:**
 - Some jaundice is present in 50% of newborns.
 - It lasts a short time and will go away. Most often, it is harmless.
 - The first place for jaundice to start is on the face.
 - Jaundice that is only of the face is harmless.
 - The level of bilirubin that is harmful is around 20. Reaching a level this high is rare.
 - High levels need to be treated with bili-lights. That's why your doctor checks your baby's bilirubin levels until it becomes low.
 - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Bottlefed:**
 - If bottle fed, increase how often you feed your baby.
 - Try to feed every 2 to 3 hours during the day.
 - Don't let your baby sleep more than 4 hours at night without a feeding.
3. **Breastfed:**
 - If breastfed, increase how often you feed your baby.
 - Nurse your baby every 1½ to 2 hours during the day.
 - Don't let your baby sleep more than 4 hours at night without a feeding.
 - Goal: At least 10 feedings every 24 hours.
4. **Infrequent Stools Means Your Baby Needs More Milk:**
 - Breastmilk and formula help carry bilirubin out of the body. Therefore, good feedings are important for bringing down the bilirubin level.
 - In the first weeks, keep track of how many stools are passed daily. The number of stools reflects how much milk your baby is getting.
 - If your baby is 5 days or older, he should have at least 3 stools daily. If stooling less than that, it usually means your baby needs more to eat.
 - Try to increase the number and amount of feedings per day.
 - If you are having any trouble with breastfeeding, consult a lactation expert. Also, schedule a weight check.
5. **What to Expect:**
 - Physiological jaundice peaks on day 4 or 5.
 - It slowly goes away over 1-2 weeks.

Call Your Doctor If

- Jaundice gets worse
- Belly or legs turn yellow
- Feeds poorly or has a weak suck
- Your baby starts to look or act abnormal
- Jaundice lasts more than 14 days
- You think your baby needs to be seen

Pediatric Care Advice

Author: Barton Schmitt MD, FAAP

Copyright 2000-2022 Schmitt Pediatric Guidelines LLC

Disclaimer: This health information is for educational purposes only. You the reader assume full responsibility for how you choose to use it. The information contained in this handout should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. Listing of any resources does not imply an endorsement.