



# Understanding Jaundice



# What is Jaundice?

Jaundice is a condition when there is too much of a natural substance called bilirubin in the blood.

During pregnancy, the birthing person's liver removes extra bilirubin for the developing baby. After delivery, the baby's liver must do this job.

## How can jaundice effect my baby?

High bilirubin in the blood can cause a baby to:

- Have yellow or orange skin and eyes
- Be hard to wake up or not sleep at all
- Be very fussy, or very tired
- Not have enough wet or dirty diapers
- Not eat enough
- Have brain damage (if the baby doesn't receive proper treatment)



# How is jaundice diagnosed?

Your baby's doctor or nurse may check your baby's bilirubin levels by:

- Using a light meter, OR
- Taking a small sample of your baby's blood

# What can I do?

If the doctor says that your baby has high bilirubin levels, you should:

- Keep all medical follow-up appointments for yourself and the baby
- Feed the baby whenever they show signs of hunger
- If you are breastfeeding, feed the baby 10 or more times every 24 hours
- Use hand expression or pumping to provide the baby with extra breastmilk if you are having trouble with latch
- Breastfeed the baby using comfortable positioning and skin-to-skin contact
- If you are having trouble with breastfeeding, ask a lactation consultant or lactation educator for help



# What will my doctor do to treat jaundice?

Your baby's doctor might do the following:

- Ask you to feed the baby more often
- Help you with breastfeeding
- Suggest phototherapy (a special type of light) for your baby

# What if my doctor asks me to feed the baby formula?

If you are breastfeeding, and the doctor asks you to feed the baby formula, ask your doctor the following questions:

When will my baby's bilirubin levels be rechecked? \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

What is the name and phone number for a lactation consultant that can help with the treatment plan?  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Name)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Phone #)

How soon can I use donor breast milk to supplement? \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

What program can help me with a breast pump so I can start supplementing with my own milk? \_\_\_\_\_ (Program)

How long do you recommend that I supplement with formula? \_\_\_\_\_ (# of Days)

How many times a day should I offer formula? \_\_\_\_\_ (x/day)

How many ounces of formula per feed? \_\_\_\_\_ (oz/feed)



# What else should I know?

## How common is jaundice in newborns?

Jaundice is common and happens in many newborn babies.

## Can jaundice be prevented?

There is no way to prevent some types of jaundice. You can prevent it from becoming serious by breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, feeding whenever the baby shows signs of hunger, getting help from a Lactation Consultant if you have challenges with breastfeeding, and keeping all your appointments with your doctor and your baby's doctor.

## Should I keep breastfeeding if my baby has jaundice?

Breast milk is the easiest food for most human babies to digest. Feeding frequently helps your baby get rid of extra bilirubin. In some cases, the lactating parent may need to express breast milk and feed the baby with a cup, spoon, or bottle until the baby gets better at feeding at the breast.





## What else should I know?

### How long does jaundice last?

Every baby is different. It is important to make sure that you feed your baby frequently by following the baby's hunger cues. If your baby is lethargic or sick, seek assistance from medical professionals immediately. Your baby may need close observation.

### Can sunlight cure jaundice?

Putting your baby in direct sunlight is not safe for treating jaundice.

### How do I know if my baby has jaundice?

All newborns should be checked for jaundice at 3-5 days of life. Take your baby to the emergency room immediately if your baby has yellow skin and eyes, it is hard to wake your baby up, and/or your baby is not having enough wet and dirty diapers.

### What resources can I use to learn more and to share with my doctor?

[Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine jaundice protocol](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)



# Questions?

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