

## WHAT IS JAUNDICE?

Jaundice is a medical condition where the skin and whites of the eyes turn yellow. **The yellow color comes from a buildup of a substance called bilirubin.** Bilirubin is a normal byproduct produced when red blood cells get broken down. Bilirubin is normally processed by the liver. However, a baby's liver is not fully developed and is unable to handle all the bilirubin, causing the buildup.

**Most newborns experience some degree of jaundice in the first week of life** as their bodies get used to processing the bilirubin. In some rare cases, very high bilirubin levels can cause a condition called kernicterus which leads to brain damage. All babies should have their bilirubin checked in the hospital before discharge. This is done with either a skin or blood test.

**Many babies need additional screenings in the first week of life,** and your baby's healthcare provider will advise you on this based on your baby's age, the level of the bilirubin, and whether the baby has other things that make jaundice more likely. Most babies need to be seen in the clinic 1-3 days after leaving the hospital.

## WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION:

### If your baby is...

- Looking more yellow (especially if it reaches the hands and below the knees)
- Not eating properly
- Not having regular stools and/or not wetting at least 6 diapers in 24 hours
- Extremely fatigued, especially if they are not waking up to eat
- Very fussy, hard to console
- Vomiting frequently
- Having a fever
- Passing stools that look pale or white in color

## HOW TO TREAT JAUNDICE?

**Regular feedings can help the baby's body to bring down bilirubin levels by flushing them out** in stool and urine. Aim for feedings about every 2 hours. In cases of jaundice that need treatment, babies may get phototherapy. This treatment uses a special light to help break down the bilirubin into a form that is easier for the baby's body to get rid of. During phototherapy, the baby wears only a diaper and eye protection to maximize how much skin is exposed to the light.

**The treatment is generally very safe and painless.** Some babies may develop a skin rash that is typically not itchy. Babies undergoing phototherapy treatment are continuously monitored to ensure their safety.

**Sunlight is not recommended as a treatment for jaundice.** Sunlight includes harmful UV and infrared light rays which can cause sunburn and dehydration. Phototherapy is controlled to ensure safety for babies undergoing treatment. In the rare case that bilirubin is extremely high and there is a risk of **kernicterus**, a blood transfusion may be indicated.

## SOURCES:

- American Academy of Pediatrics - Management of Hyperbilirubinemia in the Newborn Infant 35 or More Weeks of Gestation: [bit.ly/4sT9SfF](https://bit.ly/4sT9SfF)
- American Family Physician - Neonatal Hyperbilirubinemia: [bit.ly/4uycly5](https://bit.ly/4uycly5)
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Jaundice in Newborns: [bit.ly/41cRoep](https://bit.ly/41cRoep)
- Child Liver Disease - Recognition of Neonatal Jaundice in Different Skin Tones: [bit.ly/4deOb5x](https://bit.ly/4deOb5x)