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JAUNDICE AND YOUR NEW BORN

What is jaundice?

- Jaundice is the yellow color in the skin of many newborns
- It happens when a chemical called bilirubin builds up in the baby's blood.
- Jaundice can occur in babies of any race or color.

Why is jaundice common in newborns?

- Everyone's blood has bilirubin, which is removed by the liver.
- Before birth, the mother's liver does this for the baby.
- Most babies have jaundice in the first few days because their liver takes some time to get better at removing bilirubin.

How can I tell if my baby is jaundice?

- Your baby's skin and eyes will be yellow with jaundice.
- Jaundice usually appears in the face and upper body first then moves to the lower body, legs and feet as the level of bilirubin increases.

Can jaundice hurt my baby?

- Most infants have mild jaundice, which is harmless.
- In unusual situations the bilirubin level can get very high and may lead to brain damage in a baby. This is extremely rare.
- This is why your baby should be checked or examined by the doctor.

How and when should my baby be checked for jaundice?

- Usually your doctor can get a sense of the bilirubin level by looking at the baby's color.
- Your doctor will decide on whether a bilirubin blood level is necessary depending on the baby's age or risk factors.
- Ideally your baby should be seen in our office between 3-5 days of age, because this is usually when the bilirubin level is highest.

Does breastfeeding affect jaundice?

- Jaundice is more common in breast-fed babies than formula-fed babies.
- It is very important to make sure your baby is getting enough fluids so if you are breast feeding make sure to feed 8-12 times a day for the first few days.
- The more fluid (breast-milk or formula not water) you give the baby the lower the bilirubin level will go.
- If you are having trouble breastfeeding then talk to the doctor or nurse and consider supplementing after each feeding during the first few days until the jaundice has gone away.

Which babies require more attention for jaundice?

- Premature babies (>2-3 weeks before due date)
- Jaundice starting in the first 24 hours of age
- Poor feeders
- A lot of bruising, or bleeding under the scalp from delivery
- A family history (parent, brother or sister) of high bilirubin

How is harmful jaundice prevented?

- Most jaundice requires no treatment.
- By making sure to keep your baby well hydrated with breast-milk or formula.
- If instructed by the doctor or nurse your baby dressed in just a diaper can be placed near a warm bright closed window for 10 minutes twice a day until the jaundice goes away. Newborns should never be put in direct sunlight due to the risk of sunburn.
- When treatment is necessary, placing your baby under special lights while undressed will lower the bilirubin level. This is often done in the hospital.
- Treatment is usually started at levels much lower than those considered harmful.

When does jaundice go away?

- In breast-fed infants, jaundice may last for 2-4 weeks.
- In formula-fed infants, jaundice usually lasts 5-7 days.

When should I call the baby's doctor?

- If your baby's skin, body or eyes turn more yellow
- If your baby is not making 6-10 wet diapers in 24 hours.
- If your baby's stools are still black like tar and haven't changes to seedy or yellow/green.
- If your baby is not eating well.
- If your baby is hard to wake, fussy or has a temp of 100.4.