



Jaundice in Newborn Babies

What is Jaundice?

Jaundice is the yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes. It's very common in newborns and usually harmless. Most babies recover within 10-14 days. In premature babies, jaundice can persist up to 3 weeks.

Types of Jaundice:

1. Physiological Jaundice: Caused by natural processes and is the most common type. It occurs due to the breakdown of red blood cells, leading to bilirubin buildup.
2. Pathological Jaundice: May indicate underlying health issues like liver disorders or infections.

Why Do Newborns Get Jaundice?

- Newborns have immature livers, so it takes a few days for the enzyme that converts bilirubin to a water-soluble form to be produced.
- Bilirubin buildup causes the yellowing of skin and eyes.

What to Do if Your Baby Is Jaundiced:

- Go to any polyclinic to get your baby screened for NNJ the next day after discharge from SGH. The primary care physician and nurse will advise you on the frequency of checks depending on the jaundice levels.
- in between screening checks at the polyclinic, if you notice your baby has become significantly more jaundiced, inform your primary care physician at the polyclinic, or paediatrician promptly.
- Seek immediate attention if your baby is less than 24 hours old, excessively sleepy, not interested in feeding, or has pale chalky stools or dark tea-coloured urine.

Tests for Jaundice:

1. Transcutaneous Bilirubinometer (TcB):: Used for babies over 35 weeks gestation and more than 24 hours old. First line method of screening at polyclinics in Singapore.
2. Blood Test: If the TcB levels are high, a blood test is performed to measure bilirubin level in the baby's blood, which is obtained via a heel prick. This is the gold standard and is necessary before decision on need for treatment is made.

Treatment:

- Phototherapy: Special light waves help remove bilirubin from the body. Babies can be placed under a phototherapy lamp or on a fibre-optic pad.
- In severe cases, intense phototherapy may be needed.

Reference:

(1) Parent Information Leaflet: Jaundice in the newborn baby.

<https://www.kingstonhospital.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Parent-Information-Leaflet-Newborn-jaundice-Sept-2014-V1.pdf>.

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(2) Patient education: Jaundice in newborn infants (Beyond the Basics).

<https://www.uptodate.com/contents/jaundice-in-newborn-infants-beyond-the-basics>.

(3) Jaundice and Your Newborn Brochure - 50/pk [Brochure].

<https://www.aap.org/Jaundice-and-Your-Newborn-Brochure-50pk-Brochure>.

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