
Jaundice

What is newborn jaundice?

Jaundice is a common condition in newborn babies that causes yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes. In black and brown-skinned babies, the yellowing may be more difficult to see and visible only in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. It is very common and usually nothing to worry about.

You should feed as often as possible to encourage frequent bowel movements. If you are breastfeeding, you should continue to breastfeed your baby regularly. In some breastfed babies, the skin can continue to look a little bit yellow for up to 12 weeks. This is related to the breast milk, and is normal as long as your baby is otherwise healthy and thriving.

In more severe cases, you may be required to bring your baby back to the hospital to spend some time under a special ultraviolet light. Newborn jaundice is usually gone by about two weeks of age. More severe jaundice may need treatment. If jaundice continues for over 14 days you must contact your health visitor or GP.

Testing for jaundice

Step 1

Press your fingers lightly on the skin, as if you are checking a peach to see if it is ripe, and look at the colour of the spot where your finger was. Try pressing the tip of their nose.

Step 2

If it looks yellow (rather than white), it is likely to be jaundice. This test must only be used under good daylight or fluorescent lighting (next to a window is ideal). The baby should be undressed so different parts of the body can be compared. On darker skin where it's more difficult to see colour, check for yellowness in the whites of the eyes or gums instead.

Step 3

Talk to your health visitor or GP.

Midwife says

Jaundice usually disappears after 10 to 14 days. Jaundice appearing in the first few days of life should be reported as soon as possible to the midwife. Jaundice starting at less than 24 hours of age is an emergency and requires an urgent blood test.

See your GP without delay if:

- Your baby's jaundice does not disappear after two weeks.
- The jaundice does not start until seven days after they are born.
- Your baby's faeces (poo) are chalky white.

1

My baby appears to have mild jaundice, what should I do?

2

Feed your baby as often as possible to ensure they are not dehydrated.

3

If worried ask your midwife, health visitor or GP.