

## How long will the jaundice last?

The duration of jaundice varies greatly from one baby to another. Usually bilirubin levels (i.e. jaundice) increase over the first few days then decrease slowly over the next week or two. If baby requires phototherapy as a treatment, it usually continues for a few days, depending on the needs of the baby.<sup>1,2</sup>

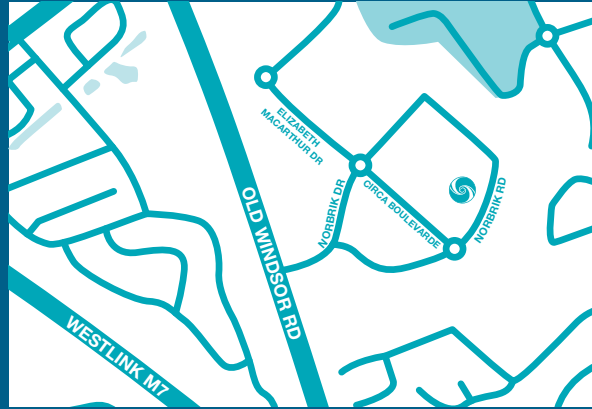
If the jaundice persists after two weeks, consult your doctor.

## Are there any long term effects of jaundice?

Long term problems from jaundice are rare due to very close monitoring of jaundice levels whilst in hospital. In most cases, there is no cause for alarm and will not present any short or long term risks to your baby's health.

## References

1. Chilton H Baby on Board (2009):58-60.
2. Eisenberg A, Murkoff H, Hathaway S. What to expect the first year (2008)
3. Bennett V, Brown L, Myles Textbook for Midwives (2014).
4. GE Healthcare 2007
5. Sydney Children's Hospitals Network 2018
6. Norwest Private Hospital Policies and Procedures. Management of an infant receiving phototherapy Aug 2017.



# Jaundice and your newborn



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12/2023

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Most newborn babies become jaundiced to some extent in the first few days after birth. This is a normal process of babies adapting to life outside the uterus (womb).<sup>1</sup>

## What is jaundice?

Jaundice is the yellowing of the skin caused by a substance called bilirubin that is produced when red blood cells become old and are broken down by the body. Bilirubin is processed in the liver and excreted by the bowels. The newborn baby's liver has to 'learn' how to do this for itself, which may take several days.<sup>1,2</sup>

For the first few days after birth, baby's liver may not work efficiently so there is build-up of bilirubin in the blood, causing a yellow discolouration of the skin and in the whites of the eyes.

A moderate amount of jaundice is quite common in many newborns and not harmful. However extremely high levels may be harmful, so this is why babies' jaundice level are monitored during the first few days to prevent the level becoming too high.<sup>1</sup>

## How is jaundice monitored?

Babies are observed daily for signs of jaundice by looking at the colour of their skin and asking about the baby's wet and dirty nappies. Jaundice levels are also assessed by checking with a light emitting device known as a Transcutaneous bilirubinometer (TcB). This is a non-invasive test which avoids heel prick and can be checked on the forehead.

If staff notice increasing jaundice, they may ask your doctor to look at the baby, and possibly order a blood test to measure the jaundice level.

## How is jaundice treated?

Feeding assists babies to process bilirubin and thereby reducing jaundice. Therefore, it is important that jaundiced babies feed well and frequently. Sometimes jaundiced babies are sleepy at feeds.<sup>3</sup> If this is so, midwives/nurses can assist you and will recommend unwrapping and stimulating baby and/or expressing colostrum to give to baby.

If the level of jaundice allows for your baby to stay in the room with you to be treated, then baby will be placed on a Bilisoft blanket.<sup>4</sup> The blanket contains ultraviolet light which helps break down the jaundice when kept directly in contact with baby's skin.

## How does Bilisoft work?

Baby is placed in a swaddle suit with the Bilisoft blanket inside and a protective covering is placed over the eyes. For this system to work optimally, it is important that baby remains wrapped in the Bilisoft blanket at ALL times, even during feeding and cuddling. This is important to avoid the need for more intensive therapy in the Special Care Nursery.

Bilisoft blanket should be used with the alphabet letters uppermost and baby's back lying directly on top of the pad. The system must be plugged in at all times.

If you are unsure how to change your baby or have concerns about Bilisoft, please ask the Nursery staff.

## Phototherapy in the Special Care Nursery

Due to the level of bilirubin, occasionally baby will need to go to the Special Care Nursery unit for phototherapy treatment using special fluorescent lights. Baby will be placed under multiple fluorescent lights that will help to breakdown the bilirubin and fade the jaundice.<sup>1,2</sup>

The light may cause baby to have increased water loss from the skin and loose bowel motions. An increase in fluid intake may be advised to compensate. Your baby will be monitored and well cared for by our speciality trained Special Care Nursery staff.<sup>5,6</sup>

