

Jaundice

Jaundice is one of the most common conditions in newborns – approximately 50-60% of full term babies and 85% of preterm babies become visibly jaundice within the first week of life.

Causes of jaundice in newborn babies

Jaundice is seen as yellow coloration of the skin and whites of the eyes, and results from elevated bilirubin levels in the blood.

Bilirubin is a yellow substance produced when red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body, are broken down. The bilirubin travels in the bloodstream to the liver, and leaves the body through urine and stool.

When you're pregnant, your body removes bilirubin from your baby through the placenta, however when newborns are born, the high volume of red blood cells can't be processed by the liver. The yellow bilirubin then builds up and accumulates in the body, including in the skin and eyes.



Gosford Private
Maternity Services

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How long will it last?

Jaundice is temporary and usually peaks at three to five days. It is first visible on the face and forehead, gradually extending over the trunk and into the whites of the eyes.

How is my baby assessed?

Your baby will usually be visually assessed by the Paediatrician and our nursing staff. Staff may also assess the bilirubin level through a Trans Cutaneous Bilirubin (TCB). This is done by using a device which is placed on your baby's chest and uses a flash of light to guide the staff as to whether or not a formal check is required.

If there are any concerns, a more accurate measurement may be required. The Paediatrician can order a heel prick blood test, or serum bilirubin (SBR).

What will this assessment show?

The test shows the level of bilirubin in the blood. Normal values of total bilirubin are from 0.3 to 1.0 mg/dL, while in a newborn higher bilirubin is normal due to the stress of birth.

Normal bilirubin in a newborn ranges up to 5 mg/dL, but many newborns have some form of jaundice and it is common to see bilirubin levels above 5 mg/dL.

How will Jaundice affect my baby?

Due to the higher levels of bilirubin, your baby may be sleepy. A sleepy baby doesn't always feed well, may become dehydrated, and not pass stools or urine, high in bilirubin. This causes further accumulation of bilirubin in the body and further lethargy.

How can I help my baby?

You can help your baby to lower its levels of bilirubin by:

- Feeding your baby frequently
- Be sure your baby is sucking effectively when feeding
- Observing your baby's urine output is adequate (four to six wet nappies/day)
- Report if your baby is very sleepy and difficult to wake
- Exposing your baby to daylight (not direct sunshine) to help disperse the yellow.

Treatments for Jaundice

For mild cases of Jaundice, a good fluid intake is essential to help flush bilirubin out in the urine, and to assist with your baby's bowel motions.

For moderate cases of Jaundice, phototherapy may be required.

What is phototherapy?

Your baby may be placed in an incubator and exposed to a fluorescent light. The light breaks down the bilirubin in the skin so that it becomes a waste product more easily excreted in the body. The bilirubin is then passed out of the body through your baby's urine.

Admission to our Special Care Nursery (SCN)

Phototherapy for Jaundice is one of the most common reasons for admission to our Special Care Nursery. Your Paediatrician or our nursing staff will advise if your baby is to be admitted.

Please respect the privacy of all babies being cared for in the Special Care Nursery (SCN). While admitted into the Special Care Nursery (SCN), it is important that you observe the following rules:

- Wash your hands before and after handling your baby
- Remember to touch only your own baby.
- Visitors are restricted from the SCN.
- Siblings are welcome to visit the SCN after performing hand hygiene.
- Mobile phones are to be switched off.

We encourage you to be involved in your baby's care as part of our philosophy of family centred care. If you have any further questions about jaundice or your baby's health, please speak to your Midwife.

