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JAUNDICE (HYPERBILIRUBINEMIA)

Jaundice (JOHN-diss) is also called hyperbilirubinemia (HI-per-bil-ee-roo-bin-EE-mee-ah). It means that there's a high level of bilirubin (BIL-ee-rue-bin) in the blood. This is a yellow pigment that settles in body tissues and can make the baby's skin look yellow. Jaundice is common in newborns. It's usually seen on the second or third day of life and goes away by the second week after birth. The jaundice doesn't usually cause any lasting effects.

WHAT CAUSES JAUNDICE

When red blood cells in the body break down, a yellow pigment called bilirubin is formed. Usually the liver is able to break down the bilirubin so that it can leave the body in the urine and stool (bowel movements). Often in newborn babies, especially premature babies, the liver is not developed enough to break down the bilirubin, and jaundice results. As the bilirubin goes into the body tissue, the skin, gums, and whites of the eyes will appear yellow. With time and treatment the baby's color returns to normal.

TREATMENT

Infants are treated with a special kind of light called a *bili-light*.

- Your baby will be placed in a bed with special lights called bili-lights. The lights shine on the baby's skin and change the bilirubin so it can be passed out of the body through the urine and stool.
- Your baby may also lie on a blanket of lights called a *bili-blanket*.
- Your baby will need to be under the light for about 1 to 3 days.
- Your baby will stay under the bili-light as much as possible. During this time the eyes will be covered with patches because the light can damage the eyes. The patches can be taken off whenever your baby is not under the light, such as when being fed or bathed.
- Blood will be drawn from your baby's heels to measure the amount of bilirubin in the blood.



Picture 1 The bili-light helps the jaundice go away.

TREATMENT (Continued)

- Your baby may have an IV (intravenous) line to make sure he or she has enough fluids. The heat of the bili-lights may make the baby sweat and lose fluids. This could cause dehydration if fluids aren't given by IV. The IV fluids also lower the bilirubin level by helping the kidneys pass the bilirubin in the urine.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

This is an important time for you to get to know your baby. We encourage you to help with your baby's care, including holding, feeding, bathing, and changing diapers. This will help you and your baby get to know each other.

This may also be a hard time for you, so let us know how we can help. We understand that the hospital may be new to you, so please ask any questions you may have.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Remember that jaundice is usually temporary and will go away in time. After your baby's bilirubin level has gone down and the bili-light is turned off, his or her blood level will be tested again. Sometimes the level will rise after the bili-light has been turned off. This may require the bili-light to be turned back on for a short time until the blood level goes down again. Your doctor may want to check the bilirubin level again after your child goes home from the hospital.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your nurse or doctor.



Picture 2 Getting to know your baby.