

## Care for your baby during treatment

- Wherever possible, your baby will be in a bed next to you
- Some babies under phototherapy struggle to stay warm, and may need to be cared for in an incubator
- Phototherapy treatment is painless, but some babies may be restless under the lights
- The lights are very bright; so we cover your baby's eyes for protection
- Your baby only wears a nappy so that as much skin as possible is exposed to the light
- The more your baby stays under the lights the more effective the treatment
- Some treatment can be continued during feeds and cuddle times
- Aim to breastfeed your baby a minimum of every three hours, as this prevents dehydration and helps baby excrete the bilirubin in their urine and poo.

## Other treatment for Jaundice

In very rare cases phototherapy is not effective enough, and your baby may need a blood transfusion to clean their blood of bilirubin.

Placing baby into sunlight to help the jaundice is not an effective treatment. Alternative or complimentary therapies have not been shown to be effective in treating jaundice.

## Further questions

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or midwife or ask to speak with a paediatrician.

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**Newborn  
Jaundice**

*Information for parents*

## What is newborn jaundice

Jaundice is yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes caused by a substance called bilirubin. Bilirubin is a normal product of red blood cells as they are replaced.

Jaundice is common in newborn babies because the newborn liver is unable to process the bilirubin fully. About 6 out of 10 babies will become jaundiced in the first week of life.

Jaundice is usually harmless, and most often goes away without treatment by 10–14 days old.

Very high levels of bilirubin can cause deafness or brain damage, so early detection and treatment of affected babies is very important.

## Which babies are more likely to get jaundice

Some newborns have a higher risk of getting jaundice such as:

- Babies who are born early
- Babies who suffered bruising at birth
- Babies who are not feeding well
- Babies who have an illness
- Babies who have a different blood group to their mother.

## Looking for signs of jaundice

Things to look out for in your baby:

- Your baby is drowsy and not feeding well
- Your baby has a yellow colour to their skin or the whites of their eyes
- Your baby's urine is dark
- Your baby's poo is pale or white.

If you notice any of these symptoms report them immediately to the staff member looking after you, or your lead maternity carer if you have gone home.

## Serum bilirubin test

It can be difficult to tell how serious the jaundice is by just looking at the skin colour.

A blood test is recommended if your baby gets jaundice at less than 24 hours old, or they have symptoms such as sleepiness or poor feeding.

This blood test is called a SBR (Serum Bilirubin), and it checks the amount of bilirubin in the blood. This tells us if treatment is needed.

## Phototherapy treatment

If the bilirubin is high, then a course of phototherapy is recommended.

Phototherapy works by using intense blue light to help the baby to get rid of bilirubin from their blood more quickly. Treatment is carried out in hospital and is overseen by a paediatrician.

The treatment usually takes 2-3 days and the bilirubin will be checked every day to make sure the treatment is working.

Once the bilirubin levels are normal and baby is well you will be discharged home. Baby may need a follow up blood test after being home for a day or two.

