



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Neonatal Jaundice in Healthy Term Babies (37weeks or more at birth)**

Issued by obstetrics and gynaecology

**Two out of every three babies develop jaundice in the first few days of life. This leaflet is designed to give you information about jaundice in newborn babies and the care your baby will get in hospital and at home.**

## **What is jaundice?**

Jaundice is the name given to a yellow appearance of the skin and the whites of the eyes. It is a common condition which usually develops during the second or third day of life. It gradually disappears in most babies by the time they are 14 days old. Jaundice that is present in the first day of life is not common. If you notice this in your baby, please ask your doctor or midwife to examine him/her.

## **What causes jaundice?**

Bilirubin is a yellow substance produced when red blood cells are broken down. As the newborn baby's liver is too immature to clear all the bilirubin, some of the excess bilirubin will bind to the skin and cause a yellow orange appearance. This is why many healthy term babies become jaundiced.

## **What will happen if your baby is jaundiced?**

If your baby becomes jaundiced whilst in hospital, they will be assessed by a midwife and a doctor. If your baby is jaundiced at home, the community midwife will carry out the assessment which may include referral to hospital for the measurement of bilirubin levels on the skin using a special machine or a blood test. The baby will be monitored afterwards until the jaundice gets better.

## How is jaundice checked?

If your baby is jaundiced, the hospital staff will perform tests which include:

- **A Transcutaneous Bilirubinometer:** this is a small device that beams a light onto the baby's skin. The device is able to calculate levels of bilirubin laid in the baby's skin.
- **Serum Bilirubin test:** a sample of blood collected from your baby, which is used to measure the level of bilirubin in the baby's blood.

The results of these tests are plotted onto a graph to see if your baby needs treatment or not. Sometimes your baby may need to have one or more of these tests.

## How is jaundice treated?

Depending on the level of bilirubin measured:

- There may be no treatment needed
- Your baby may require extra feeding support
- Your baby may need special light treatment called **Phototherapy**.

## What is phototherapy?

Phototherapy treatment is carried out in the hospital and involves placing your baby under a special blue light. This light helps to speed up the breakdown of bilirubin. Your baby will have their bilirubin level checked regularly after starting treatment to ensure that the amount of phototherapy your baby is receiving is adjusted appropriately. This can mean that your baby may require two or more special lights to speed up the breakdown of bilirubin.

During phototherapy treatment you will be encouraged to:

- Keep your baby naked, with just a nappy and eye pads whilst under the light/s.
- Feed your baby often so that the baby produces plenty of urine.

## **How long will treatment take?**

In most cases babies are treated for a couple of days in hospital. Once the levels of bilirubin have fallen to a low level the lights may be stopped. Once treatment is stopped, your baby may be discharged home from hospital if s/he is feeding very well. When you are at home a community midwife will visit to monitor the jaundice.

## **Can jaundice harm the baby?**

Jaundice is not usually dangerous for babies, but very high levels of bilirubin if untreated can cause some damage to the brain.

## **What should you do if your baby is jaundiced?**

If you are concerned that your baby is jaundiced, ask yourself these important questions:

- Is my baby feeding more than 10 minutes 8 times a day?
- Has my baby passed urine four or more times today? Is my baby's urine yellow?
- Has my baby passed stools today or are my baby's stools pale or clay coloured?

Being able to answer these questions will be helpful in assessment of jaundice.

# Useful Contact Numbers

## **The Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital**

Northumbria Way

Cramlington

NE23 6NZ

Birthing Centre: 0191 607 2318

## **Hillcrest Midwifery Led Unit**

Infirmery Drive

Alnwick

NE66 2NS

01665 626 732

## **Berwick Midwifery Led Unit**

High Green

Berwick-upon-Tweed

TD15 1LT

01289 356 622

## **Hexham Midwifery Led Unit**

Corbridge Road

Hexham

NE46 1QJ

01434 655 352

## **Acknowledgement**

NICE (2010) Jaundice in newborn babies – Information for the public





## **Alternative Formats**

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

## **Other sources of information**

### **NHS 111**

### **NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### **NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)**

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### **Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

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