

WHAT IS JAUNDICE?

JAUNDICE IN A NEWBORN BABY IS THE YELLOW COLOURING OF THEIR SKIN AND THE WHITES OF THEIR EYES. IT IS COMMON IN BABIES AND IS NOT THE SAME AS JAUNDICE IN ADULTS. THE MEDICAL TERM FOR JAUNDICE IN BABIES IS NEONATAL JAUNDICE.

YOUR BABY MAY LOOK JAUNDICED ON THEIR SECOND OR THIRD DAY OF LIFE. MOST TIMES THE JAUNDICE WILL GO AWAY OVER ONE TO TWO WEEKS (3 WEEKS FOR PRETERM BABIES) AND DOES NOT CAUSE ANY LONG-TERM PROBLEMS FOR MOST BABIES. SOMETIMES THE JAUNDICE NEEDS TO BE TREATED USING A SPECIAL BLUE LIGHT CALLED PHOTOTHERAPY.

CAN JAUNDICE HURT MY BABY?

MOST JAUNDICE IS MILD AND IS USUALLY NOT HARMFUL. IF YOUR BABY IS JAUNDICED AT ANY TIME IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT A NURSE OR DOCTOR SEES THEM TO WORK OUT IF THEY NEED ANY SPECIAL TESTS OR TREATMENT. IF YOUR BABY IS TREATED STRAIGHT AWAY THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE OF ANY ONGOING PROBLEMS. HOWEVER IN RARE CASES IF YOUR BABY IS NOT TREATED THEY MAY HAVE SOME PROBLEMS WITH THEIR DEVELOPMENT. THIS MAY INCLUDE SEIZURES AND MUSCLE SPASMS, DELAYS IN DEVELOPMENT, DEAFNESS AND PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DISABILITY.

WHAT CAUSES JAUNDICE IN BABIES

BEFORE YOUR BABY IS BORN THEY HAVE A LOT OF RED BLOOD CELLS TO CARRY OXYGEN FROM THE PLACENTA. AFTER BIRTH THEY DON'T NEED AS MANY OF THESE CELLS. THE RED BLOOD CELLS ARE BROKEN DOWN IN THE LIVER AND ARE PASSED IN THEIR STOOLS/POO (BOWEL MOVEMENTS).

YOUR BABY LOOKS JAUNDICED (YELLOW) WHEN THERE IS A BUILD UP OF THE BROKEN DOWN RED BLOOD CELLS (BILIRUBIN) IN THEIR SKIN. THERE IS MORE CHANCE OF YOUR BABY GETTING JAUNDICED AND NEEDING TREATMENT IF THEY:

- ARE BORN BEFORE FULL TERM
- ARE NOT FEEDING WELL
- HAD A BROTHER OR SISTER WHO WAS JAUNDICED
- HAVE A DIFFERENT BLOOD GROUP FROM YOU (THEIR MOTHER)
- BECAME BRUISED DURING THEIR BIRTH
- HAVE AN INFECTION

THERE ARE ALSO OTHER REASONS YOUR BABY MAY BE JAUNDICED WHICH YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE WILL DISCUSS WITH YOU IF REQUIRED.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE JAUNDICE LEVEL IN MY BABY?

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO MEASURE THE JAUNDICE LEVEL. A SPECIAL MACHINE CAN BE PLACED ON YOUR BABY'S SKIN TO CHECK THE JAUNDICE LEVEL. IF IT IS HIGH USING THE METER, OR THE HOSPITAL DOESN'T USE THE METER A BLOOD TEST CAN HELP DECIDE IF TREATMENT IS NEEDED. JAUNDICE IS MEASURED BY TAKING A SMALL AMOUNT OF BLOOD FROM YOUR BABY TO CHECK THE LEVEL OF BILIRUBIN.

