

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a question, compliment, comment or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

Jaundice in newborn babies

A patient's guide

Whittington Health
Magdala Avenue
London
N19 5NF
Phone: 020 7272 3070
www.whittington.nhs.uk

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What is jaundice?

Jaundice is the yellow colouring of your baby's skin and the whites of the eyes. It affects many babies, especially premature babies.

What causes it?

It is caused by a waste substance in the blood called bilirubin. Bilirubin is formed when red blood cells are broken up. The liver then normally helps to remove it from the body.

In new-born babies, there are many extra red blood cells in the blood that have to be broken up. Some babies' livers are not mature enough to cope and so the bilirubin is left in the blood, causing the yellow colour.

How can it be treated?

Often your baby will gradually recover from jaundice as the liver becomes more active. If the jaundice appears early after birth or the jaundice increases, then your baby will have a blood test to see if he or she needs extra help. This extra help is called 'phototherapy' – a treatment using special light.

How does phototherapy work?

With phototherapy your baby can change the bilirubin into a different form so that it can be expelled in the urine and stools. As a result, you may find that your baby's urine is dark and concentrated. The stools may also be a bit loose. Phototherapy treatment usually takes a few days, depending on the level of jaundice.

How is the phototherapy given?

Phototherapy can be given in two ways:

1. Phototherapy lamp – light treatment from above your baby.
2. Bili bed – the same light treatment from underneath your baby.

Our Hospital@home service can deliver phototherapy by bilibed at home providing the baby has an Islington GP and deemed suitable by midwife, clinicians for home therapy. The nurses will visit regularly to assess and monitor your baby.

Please see our H@H leaflet for additional information

For both methods your baby will need to:

- be nursed without any clothes on (as clothes block out the light)
- be fed regularly (breast or bottle)
- potentially have extra fluids to prevent dehydration (when the body fluids get very low)
- to have regular blood tests to check jaundice level
- to have regular temperature checks and
- to have regular cuddles from Mum and Dad!

Some other things to consider

If your baby is being treated by phototherapy lamp, they will also need to:

- be nursed in an incubator and
- wear eye pads (to protect the eyes against bright light).

You may find that your baby is rather sleepy and unwilling to feed when jaundiced. To prevent them becoming dehydrated, the doctor may need to feed some extra fluids through a tiny tube (via the nose). As the jaundice gets better, you will find that your baby will start to feed better and become more active. If you find any of this treatment upsetting, please have a word with the nursing or medical staff in the neonatal unit. Once the jaundice has improved, your baby can stop the treatment and the doctor will discuss with you if there is a need for more tests.

Any further questions?

If you would like more information, please ask your midwife or one of the doctors or phone 020 7288 5249 from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday