

Newborn Jaundice/Phototherapy

Jaundice is the yellow color seen in the skin of many newborns, and is usually harmless. Jaundice is caused by an excess of bilirubin in the blood. Bilirubin is made by the normal breakdown of red blood cells. Bilirubin is processed through the liver. Before the baby is born the mother's liver does this for the baby. After the baby is born, it might take a few days for the baby's liver to get better at removing bilirubin. If the bilirubin becomes too high, it will need to be treated to prevent serious complications such as hearing loss, intellectual impairment and brain damage.

A small instrument called a Bilimeter is used to assess bilirubin levels. This is a non-invasive method and gives results in a matter of seconds. A graph is used to assess the age of an infant to the bilirubin level. If the level is moderate to high, a blood test is done to determine the exact level. Treatment for high bilirubin levels is done by phototherapy.

Phototherapy is the use of special lights to help your baby break down the bilirubin.

Treatment

Expose as much of your baby's skin to the lights as possible.

Keep your baby's eyes covered with the mask provided while the lights are on.

Keep your baby under the lights as much as possible. Only take baby out of lights for feedings or other cares.

Jaundice may make your baby sleepier than usual or less eager to eat. It is important that your baby feed every 2-3 hours if breastfed, and every 3-4 hours if formula fed. Please tell your nurse right away if you cannot get your baby to eat.

The baby's doctor may instruct you to supplement to ensure your baby is getting enough fluids to help prevent dehydration and to help the removal of bilirubin from the body.

While receiving phototherapy your baby might have frequent dark green or black, tarry or watery stools as the bilirubin is being removed from the body. Be sure to keep your baby's skin clean, especially in the diaper area.

Do not use lotions, creams or powders during phototherapy.

A blood sample will be drawn on your baby to check the bilirubin level. This may happen more than once a day while your baby is receiving phototherapy.

The baby can be in the room with you or in the nursery if you prefer.

It is important to keep track of every time the baby eats, wets and stools. A form will be provided for you to use, or you may tell the nurse.

REMEMBER, *the more your baby is exposed to the phototherapy lights, the more effective the treatment!*

