Jaundiced Babies, an Information Guide for Parents

Most newborn babies become jaundiced to some extent in the first few days after birth. This is a normal process of babies adapting to life outside the uterus (womb).

What is jaundice*?*
Jaundice is the yellowing of the skin caused by a substance called bilirubin. Bilirubin is produced when red blood cells become old & are broken down by the body. Normally it is processed in the liver & excreted by the bowels. This tends to make the baby's stools runny/loose & greenish. The newborn baby's liver has to 'learn' how to do this for itself, which may take several days.

A moderate amount of jaundice is quite common in many newborns and not harmful. However extremely high levels may be harmful, so this is why babies' jaundice level are monitored during the first few days to prevent the level becoming too high.

How is jaundice monitored?
Midwives and nurses check babies for signs of jaundice by looking at the colour of their skin and asking about the baby's wet & dirty nappies. Jaundice levels are also assessed by checking with a Transcutaneous Bilirubin meter (TcB). A TcB is a non-invasive test which avoids heel prick and can be checked on forehead.

If staff notice increasing jaundice they may ask your paediatrician to look at the baby, and possibly order a blood test to monitor the jaundice level.

How is jaundice treated?
Feeding assists babies to process the bilirubin and thereby reducing the jaundice. Therefore, it is important that jaundiced babies feed well and often/ frequently. Sometimes jaundiced babies are sleepy at feeds. If this is so, midwives/nurses can assist you and will recommend unwrapping and stimulating baby and/or expressing colostrum to give to baby.
Depending on the level of jaundice, the baby require treatment by special fluorescent lights called *phototherapy.* The phototherapy lights help the baby breakdown the bilirubin.

Treatment may involve either the baby being placed naked under the phototherapy lights and/or wrapped in a '*Bilicocoon' or 'BiliSoft'* where baby can continue to have light treatment making feeding and cuddles easy.

CARE HINTS

The midwife/nurse will set up your baby in the most appropriate equipment chosen for the level of light therapy your baby doctor has prescribed. They will show you how to care for your baby and share hints for keeping baby comfortable.

This leaflet is designed to help you care for your baby using the bilicocoon. We will be however, checking in with you 4 hourly. ***The maternity staff will check your understanding of this leaflet's contents and ask that you sign on the careplan that you have been provided with it***

• ***Please ask questions, we will plan your baby's daily care with you***

• ***We will work with you to make sure baby is feeding effectively as this helps reduce jaundice. We advise-***
  • ***demand breast feeding (maximum of 4 hours between feeds)***
  • ***If formula feeding, recommend 3 - 4 hourly feeding***
  • ***Phototherapy may be interrupted for feeding***

• ***We will check baby's temperature every 4 hours, to ensure it is within normal limits***
• ***Checking baby's skin at each nappy change is important as the light therapy can cause loose or frequent stools (sometimes greenish in colour!) which can irritate your baby's skin, this will resolve once the phototherapy stops***

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- *We advise not to use any lotions or oils on baby's skin as the heat from the light may cause a mild rash*
- *Place baby on their back in the cot*
- *Cuddles- We encourage short breaks - for a maximum of 30 minutes. To do this, unfasten baby from the Bilicocoon bag, remove the eye mask and enjoy skin to skin cuddles while you are breast or bottlefeeding your baby. Cuddles are possible whilst baby is in the bilicocoon.*
- *The eye mask can be reused and is easy to reapply*
- *Remember to remove the eye mask at feeds, the midwives will show you how to check for eye discharge and conjunctivitis. It's important to clean your baby's eyes every 4 hours with sterile normal saline and sterile cotton balls.*

How to use the Bilicocoon

- *It may be helpful to watch the YouTube clip, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMaKro2KxR8*
- *For hygienic and comfort purposes, always use the provided bilicocoon cover*
- *Place the bilicocoon cover on a flat surface with the patterned front facing upwards.*
- *Gently insert the fibre optic light pad with the manufactures label on into the bottom cover. The light side should face up and should be against the side of the plain cover*
- *Then insert the 2nd fibre optic light pad into the **patterned** cover. The light should face downwards.*
- *Cross and secure the pad fixing tapes so the pads cannot slip out.*

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- *Undress your baby leaving only a small nappy on.*

- *Place baby on the bottom cover, shoulders at the top of the cover, neck and head free.*
- *Secure baby using the infant fastening system (fold any flaps which are too long to ensure maximum skin exposure)*

- *Check baby is securely positioned then fold the front patterned part over the baby's chest, below the chin, and secure with the sticky tabs. Make sure your baby's head is OUTSIDE the bag*

- *Whenever the light therapy is on, COVER YOUR BABIES EYES, with the provided eye mask. It is extremely important that your baby's eyes are protected from the blue light.*

- *Insert the fibre optic cable into the light box.*
- *Turn the Bilicocoon box on using the black switch. You may switch the equipment off for nappy change etc.*
- ***HINT* The lights on the pads should face each other, i.e., both facing the baby***

- *Try to protect the fibre optic cable from damage by not allowing it to bend excessively or get crushed under the cot wheels or against the bed.*

- *The timer can be be set for 4 hours. This is the maximum time between baby cares and assessment.*

How long will the jaundice last?

The duration of jaundice varies greatly from one baby to another. Usually bilirubin levels (i.e. jaundice) increase over the first few days then decrease slowly over the next week or two. If the baby requires phototherapy as a treatment, it usually continues for a few days, dependant on individual babies.
Your paediatrician will advise how often the baby's jaundice levels will be tested, the test will also be repeated 24 hours after phototherapy ceases