

Jaundice of the Newborn

What is jaundice?

Jaundice is when your new baby has yellow looking skin. The whites of your baby's eyes may be yellow. It is caused by high levels of a yellow pigment called bilirubin in your baby's blood. This pigment can build up for many reasons.

What are some of the common reasons for jaundice?

- **Physiologic Jaundice:** The baby's liver isn't ready yet to get rid of the yellow pigment called bilirubin on its own. This type of jaundice starts when the baby is 2 or 3 days old. It goes away by the time your baby is 2 weeks old. This happens in about half of all babies.
- **Breast – “non-feeding” jaundice:** This occurs in the first few days of life when the baby is feeding poorly at the breast and does not get enough colostrum (the first milk) and is dehydrated.
- **Breast milk jaundice** is rare: It is usually mild and a normal response to breast milk. It starts when the baby is 4 to 7 days old. It may last 3 to 10 weeks. Your baby does not need to stop breastfeeding.
- **Blood group problems:** This occurs when the baby's blood type has differences from the mother's blood type. It can be serious, and usually starts within the first day of life.

How can I help my baby avoid jaundice?

- **Feed your baby frequently.** Babies should feed every 2-3 hours. This can help lower the bilirubin.
- If your baby sleeps more than 4 hours at night, awaken them for a feeding. When your pediatrician tells you that your baby is gaining weight normally and feeding well, you may let the baby direct the feeding schedule at night.

How can I tell if my breastfed newborn is drinking enough?

- Nurse your baby frequently (approximately every 2-3 hours).

This is the number of feedings and diapers you can expect from birth up to 3 days of life:

- Birth to 24 hours of life: **at least 4-6 feedings** (1 urine & 1 stool).
- 24- 48 hours of life: **at least 6-8 feedings** (2 urines & 2 stools).
- 48 hours - 3 days of life: **at least 8-12 feedings per day** (3 urines & 3 stools).
- After the first few days of life, your baby should have 6-8 wet diapers every day, and 1-4 soft stools per day (brown or yellow)
- After the first week, some breastfed babies will stool with every feed and others will only stool once every 3-4 days (or more). When the milk comes in (by 3rd-4th day), the stools change to yellow and soft.
- The baby should feed approximately 15-25 minutes on the 1st breast and mom should feel her breast empty. She should then offer the 2nd breast and let her baby nurse until finished.

How can I tell if my formula-fed newborn is drinking enough?

- Look for stooling 1-4 times per day and 6-8 wet diapers per day.
- A formula-fed baby should take in an average of 2-3 ounces every 2-3 hours by the 3rd to 4th day of life.

When should I call my baby's doctor?

Call your doctor if:

- You think your baby is not getting enough fluid (not enough wet diapers)
- Your baby appears yellow or orange on the skin or the whites of the eyes, especially if this is increasing
- You have other concerns or questions

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by the University of Michigan Health System (UMHS) for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by UMHS and for which UMHS does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Reviewed by: Heather Burrows MD, PhD, Department of Pediatrics

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health System](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 07/2016