Neonatal Jaundice

Jaundice means there is a yellow color to the skin or the white parts of the eyes. It is due to high levels of bilirubin. Because the newborn baby's liver is immature, some jaundice is normally present in newborns. The bilirubin level tends to peak between the second and fourth day of life, and usually returns to normal by 5-7 days. However, some breastfed newborns can remain jaundiced for up to 2-3 weeks.

CAUSES

Newborn jaundice can also be caused by:

- Problems with the mother's blood type and the baby's blood type not being compatible.
- Maternal diabetes.
- Internal bleeding of the baby.
- Infection.

If the bilirubin rises very high, this can lead to permanent nerve damage.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of newborn jaundice include:

- Yellow or orange color to the skin or whites of eyes.
- Poor feeding.
- Fever.
- Overall ill appearance.

DIAGNOSIS

Your baby's caregiver may require your baby to have a blood test to check the bilirubin and blood counts within the blood. **If your infant appears well and the bilirubin level stays below 20 mg/dL, no treatment is usually needed.**

TREATMENT

Treatment using special lights (*phototherapy*) may be used in the hospital or at home. Your baby's caregiver will instruct you on how and when to use these lights at home if necessary. Follow-up exams and bilirubin levels may be needed to see if your baby is improving. If the bilirubin levels do not improve or your baby's condition gets worse, other treatments, such as an exchange transfusion may become necessary. Your baby's caregiver will talk to you more about this if needed.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You notice any of the above listed symptoms.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your baby has a fever, breathing problems or feeding problems.
- Your baby becomes dehydrated.
- Your baby is less active, floppy, or has a temperature higher than 100.4° F (38° F).

Call your local medical emergency services (911 in the U.S) if your baby stops breathing or turns blue in color.

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