Jaundice

Jaundice is yellowish discoloration of the skin, whites of the eyes (*sclerae*) and mucus membranes. It is caused by increased levels of bilirubin in the blood (*hyperbilirubinemia*). Bilirubin is a normal by-product of the breakdown of red blood cells. Bilirubin is normally removed by the kidneys. High levels of it cause the urine to turn dark. Most of the time jaundice means the liver or bile system is not working normally. Less often, jaundice happens due to a problem that includes damage to normal red blood cells.

CAUSES

The most common causes include:

- Viral hepatitis.
- Gall stones.
- Excess use of alcohol.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of liver or gall bladder disease may include:

- Poor appetite.
- Nausea.
- Stomach pain.
- Fatigue.
- Fever.
- Itching.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of the cause may require:

- Urine and blood tests.
- Abdominal ultrasound.
- CT scans.

- While tests are being done, it is important to avoid all alcoholic drinks.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- If your caregiver feels that the jaundice may be due to viral hepatitis or another infection problem, you should:
  - Avoid close personal contacts.
  - Avoid preparing food or sharing utensils with others.
  - Be sure to wash your hands often.
- Keep in close touch with your caregiver regarding test results and treatment recommendations.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increased pain.
- You have repeated vomiting and dehydration.
- You develop a high fever, severe weakness or headache or mental confusion.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.