



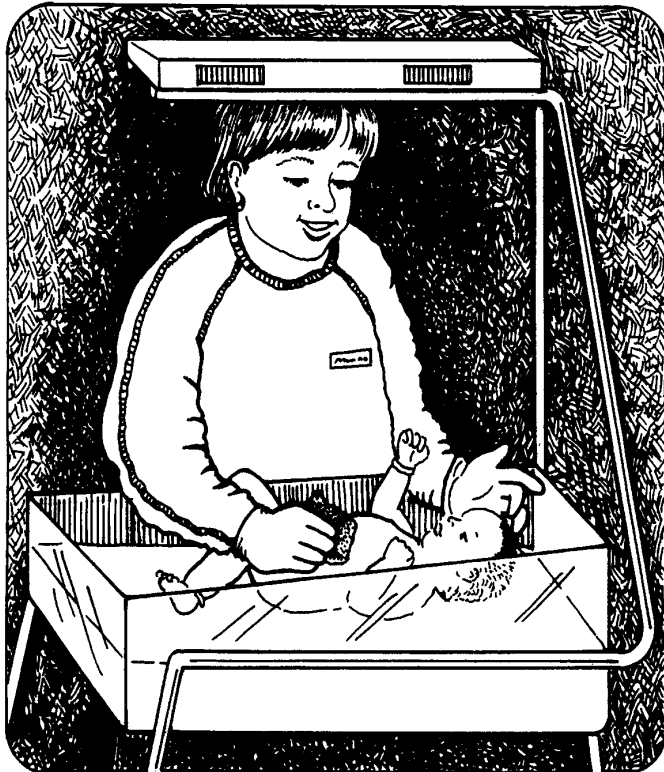
Jaundice

What Is It?

Jaundice is a yellowing of the skin and eyes which develops when too much bilirubin (the yellow pigment present in all red blood cells) is in the bloodstream. Many newborn babies have some jaundice the first few days while the liver builds up to its full working capacity. Doctors can measure the bilirubin with a blood sample. Very high levels of bilirubin can cause cerebral palsy, brain damage or death, so close monitoring and treatment are sometimes necessary.

Causes

- Physiologic jaundice occurs when more red blood cells than are needed are created inside the womb. After birth, the baby's immature liver has trouble eliminating the bilirubin fast enough.
- Pathologic jaundice most often means a disease or abnormality is present. An infected organ, malformation or congenital defect of the liver, or Rh and ABO blood incompatibilities are possible causes.
- Breast-milk jaundice is extremely rare and is caused by a substance in breast milk that interferes with the bilirubin processing in a newborn.
- Infectious hepatitis is a rare cause of jaundice in small babies.



Treatment

- *Mild jaundice needs only to be monitored.*
- *Ultraviolet light, or phototherapy, can be used to decompose the light-sensitive bilirubin in more severe or lingering cases.*
- *If breast-milk jaundice occurs, your doctor may recommend that you consider stopping breast-feeding for a day or two to help decrease the bilirubin levels.*
- *In extreme cases, a blood transfusion can be performed.*
- *Contact your baby's doctor if your baby's color doesn't improve after the third day.*