

Fast Facts

Jaundice (Hyperbilirubinemia)

- Occurs when body has high levels of bilirubin, which is formed by the breakdown of red blood cells that the liver filters out of the bloodstream. Liver uses bilirubin to help form bile
- Bilirubin has a yellow-orange pigment and when there is an excessive amount in the bloodstream, it causes the skin, sclera (whites of the eyes) and mucous membranes (mouth, etc.) to turn yellow

Infants

- Common in infants because often their liver isn't mature enough to remove bilirubin from their bloodstream quickly (particularly true for infants who are born before 38 weeks gestation and some who are breastfed and having difficulty nursing or getting enough nutrition from breastfeeding, which can lead to dehydration and low-calorie intake meaning the baby doesn't have frequent enough bowel movements to get rid of the bile containing bilirubin)
- Two other causes can be significant bruising during birth, which results in more red blood cells being broken down than the liver can initially filter out, and if the mother's blood type is different from the baby's (the baby can receive antibodies through the placenta that causes their blood cells to break down more quickly).
- Symptoms appear within the first seven days of life, but most often between the second and fourth day. This is why it is important to have the baby examined by a doctor within two days of discharge, especially if they were discharged earlier than 72 hours after birth.

Adults

- Occurs because there is a problem during one of the three phases of bilirubin production (before, during or after)
- Before the production of bilirubin (aka unconjugated jaundice) include increased levels of bilirubin from the reabsorption of a large collection of clotted or partially clotted blood under the skin (hematoma) or hemolytic anemias (this is where blood cells are destroyed/removed from the bloodstream before their normal lifespan is over)
- During the production of bilirubin include viruses (Hepatitis A, chronic Hepatitis B or C and Epstein-Barr virus infection—infectious mononucleosis), alcohol, autoimmune disorders, rare genetic metabolic disorders and certain medications (acetaminophen, penicillin, oral contraceptives, chlorpromazine and estrogenic/anabolic steroids)
- After bilirubin production include gallstones, gallbladder inflammation, gallbladder cancer and pancreatitis

<i>Symptoms</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Prevention</i>
<p>-Skin, sclera (whites of your eyes) and mucous membranes (mouth, etc.) turn yellow</p> <p><i>Infants</i> <i>See doctor immediately if:</i> -Skin becomes more yellow -Listless/sick/difficult to awaken</p>	<p><i>Infants</i> <i>Not severe:</i> -No treatment (doctor may recommend more frequent or supplemental feedings in order to increase the number of bowel movements that your baby is having) -Mild jaundice disappears on its own within two to three weeks</p> <p><i>Severe:</i></p>	<p><i>Infants</i> -Not possible if caused by incompatibility between the mother's and baby's blood types</p> <p>-For other types, ensure the baby is getting adequate feedings throughout the day to encourage increased bowel movements to help clear out the excess bilirubin</p>

<p>-Aren't gaining weight or feeding poorly -Makes high-pitched cries -Develops any other symptoms that concern you -Jaundice lasts more than three weeks</p> <p>Adults -No symptoms</p> <p><i>Short-term condition:</i> -Fever -Chills -Abdominal pain -Flu-like symptoms</p> <p><i>Long-term condition:</i> -Weight loss -Itchy skin (pruritus)</p>	<p>-Phototherapy (light therapy)</p> <p><i>Blood Incompatibility Only:</i> -Intravenous (IV) transfusion of immunoglobulins -Exchange transfusion</p> <p>Adults -Treat underlying condition</p> <p><i>Short-term types:</i> -Take it easy -Drink plenty of water -Do not injure your liver while recovering</p> <p><i>Long-term types:</i> -Manage the condition that causes jaundice -Control itching with a medication (cholestyramine)</p>	<p><i>Current recommendations:</i> -Breastfed infants = at least 8 – 12 feedings a day for the first several days -Formula-fed infants = 1 – 2 ounces of formula at least every two to three hours for the first week</p> <p>Adults -No specific guidelines due to wide number of causes</p> <p><i>General tips:</i> -Avoid hepatitis infections -Don't consume large amounts of alcohol on a regularly basis -Maintain a healthy weight -Keep cholesterol within recommended limits</p>
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