

Jaundice, and Home Phototherapy Treatment

What is Jaundice?

Jaundice is a common, temporary and usually harmless condition in newborn infants. It affects both full-term and premature babies, usually appearing during the first week of the baby's life. Jaundice occurs when there is a build-up of a naturally occurring substance in the blood called bilirubin. Bilirubin is produced by the normal breakdown of red blood cells. There are different causes of jaundice.

Normal jaundice will resolve without treatment within a week or two. More severe (abnormal) jaundice will require treatment. The need for treatment is determined by the age of the infant, the bilirubin level, and the presence of certain underlying medical problems.

Sometimes, left untreated, very severe jaundice can cause cerebral palsy, brain damage or deafness. Treatment can prevent harmful effects of jaundice, therefore started at levels that are much lower than those at which brain damage is a concern.

What is Treatment?

Phototherapy, a "**Bili Blanket**", is the most common form of treatment for jaundice. This at-home treatment is used for a few days until the baby's liver is mature enough to handle the bilirubin on its own.

Phototherapy (light treatment) is the process of using light to eliminate bilirubin in the blood. Your baby's skin and blood absorb these light waves, which change bilirubin into products which can pass through the baby's system as frequent, greenish, loose bowel movements.

Frequent effective feedings are important for the jaundiced baby as bilirubin is eliminated through the bowel movements. The more hours you have the bili blanket on the baby the more effective the treatment.

It is important that the plain lighted area of the covered pad - the area without writing - is against the baby's skin at all times during treatment. Clothing/blanket can then be applied over the system.

Do not apply anything to the skin, such as lotions or powder, during treatment. There is some heat generated by the lights so be careful not to overheat the baby by over dressing or using thick blankets.

Short term removal of the bili pad is permitted:

- During diaper changes
- Short periods during feeding (no longer than 20 minutes)
- When going to the lab to have blood drawn

Two ways to use the bili blanket:

- It is not necessary to rotate the pad on the body if you are using the blanket as a wrap around the baby.
- If you use the blanket with your baby lying on the pad, you should rotate the pad back then belly. Doing this after a feeding is an easy way to remember the rotation.

Are there Side Effects of Using Phototherapy?

There are no harmful side effects documented in research with correct use of a bili blanket. It is normal for a fine red rash, mild skin irritation or dryness where the light shines on the skin or the pad rubs. It is normal for the skin to appear whiter as the bilirubin level comes down.

Call Eden Park Pediatrics immediately if your baby:

- Will not or cannot eat at least 6 times each 24 hours
- Has no wet or dirty diapers in a 24 hour time period

Severe cases of jaundice may require readmission of your baby for in-hospital phototherapy treatment.

For technical problems or billing/insurance questions about the bili blanket, call the Medical Equipment company.

For questions about the care of your baby during phototherapy, call Eden Park Pediatrics. We will call you every day with the results of the blood tests. If you have not received a call within 3 hours after the blood work has been drawn, please call the office – 717-569-8518.