

on call

whites of baby's eyes are yellow

Q The whites of our newborn's eyes have recently turned yellow. Could he have jaundice? Isn't jaundice a sign of liver disease?

It is possible your newborn may have jaundice. Jaundice is a very common condition in newborns caused by an elevated level in the blood of bilirubin, a brownish yellow substance found in bile. This causes a yellow discoloration of the skin and, sometimes, the whites of the eyes or lining of the mouth. Bilirubin is a product of the normal breakdown of red blood cells that is usually eliminated by the liver. Jaundice first develops in the face and spreads downward over the body.

In adults, jaundice is commonly a sign of disease or dysfunction of the liver. In a newborn, however, jaundice occurs from a build-up of bilirubin when the developing liver becomes overburdened by increased red blood cell breakdown in the first days of life. Jaundice can be more common in infants that are premature, have a sibling with jaundice as a newborn, have a different blood type than the mother or are breastfed.

Jaundice starts in the first two or three days of life and typically resolves by seven to 10 days. Infants are routinely screened for jaundice after birth, since, in rare cases, very high untreated levels can lead to neurological or developmental problems. Mild cases of jaundice typically resolve with normal care.

Parents may be instructed to feed the infant more frequently, expose the infant to sunlight and monitor the child for adequate urine and stool output. If you think your newborn may have jaundice, contact your pediatrician.



pain relievers that are best for children

Q I've heard different experts recommend different pain relievers — baby aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen — for children with fever or pain. Which one is the best to give my 5-year-old, and does it depend of whether she has a fever or pain?

Acetaminophen and ibuprofen are the best medications to treat fever or pain in infants and children. Baby aspirin, though misleading from its name, is not recommended for children younger than 18 due to an increased risk of Reye's Syndrome. Reye's Syndrome is a rare but potentially fatal condition that has been associated with the use of aspirin in children with viral infections. Aspirin, even baby aspirin, should never be given to infants or children unless explicitly prescribed by your pediatrician for very specific medical conditions.

Acetaminophen (brand name Tylenol) is a fever-reducer and pain reliever that is safe to use in infants and children. Ibuprofen (brand name Motrin or Advil) also acts as a fever reducer and pain reliever as well as an anti-inflammatory. Ibuprofen can be given to infants older than 6 months and children of all ages. Both acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be used to treat fever and relieve pain, however, ibuprofen is often more effective at treating pain with underlying inflammation due to its additional anti-inflammatory effect. Common cases of pain and inflammation include teething, sprains, muscle strains and fractures.