

Jaundice

What is jaundice?

Jaundice is yellowing of skin and eyes. It is caused by high levels of bilirubin in your body. Bilirubin is a substance that is produced when the liver breaks down red blood cells. Jaundice may be a symptom of liver, pancreas, or gallbladder problems. Genetic disorders, medicines such as acetaminophen, or excess alcohol use may also cause jaundice.

Risk factors

- Viral liver infections such as hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C
- Alcoholic liver disease
- A blockage of a bile duct by a gallstone (usually) or tumor
- A toxic reaction to a drug or medicinal herb
- Premature birth
- having sex with people with viral hepatitis
- Significant bruising during birth

Signs and symptoms

- Tea-colored urine
- Pale or gray bowel movements
- Itching
- Fatigue or unexplained weight loss
- Muscle or joint pain
- Nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain
- Confusion



Yellowing skin and eyes



Dark urine



Light-colored stools



Nausea and vomiting



Loss of appetite



Extreme fatigue

Diagnosis

- Urine test
- Liver function and blood tests
- ultrasound scan
- computerised tomography (CT) scan
- magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan

Treatment

- Medicine may be given to decrease bilirubin levels and reduce itching.
- Various medications may be used to treat the conditions leading to jaundice, such as steroids in the treatment of some autoimmune disorders.
- Antibiotics may be required for infectious causes of jaundice, or for the complications associated with certain conditions leading to jaundice (for example, cholangitis).
- Blood transfusions may be required in individuals with anemia from hemolysis or as a result of bleeding.
- Surgery and various invasive procedures may be required for certain patients with jaundice. For example, certain patients with gallstones may require surgery.

Clinical teaching

- Drink more liquids as directed. Liquids help to stay hydrated and urinate more. This helps to prevent harm to the kidneys.
- Eat foods low in fat. Healthy low-fat foods include fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, low-fat dairy products, beans, lean meats, and fish. These foods are easier to digest and may help reduce symptoms.
- Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol harms your liver and make symptoms worse.