

# Jaundice

Jaundice is a yellowing of the skin and eyes – it is not a disease but a symptom of a disorder.

## What to look for

- A yellowish or greenish tinge to the skin.
- Yellowing of the whites of the eyes
- Dark-coloured urine.
- In some cases, generalised itching.

Jaundice, a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes, is not a disease itself but a symptom of an underlying disorder.

Bilirubin, a substance which is involved in the breakdown of red blood cells, accumulates in the bloodstream and causes the yellow discolouration. In a normal healthy body, bilirubin and bile (a digestive juice) mix and pass safely out of the body through the digestive tract. But if the liver is not functioning properly or the passage of bile is obstructed (perhaps by gallstones), bilirubin backs up into the blood. Jaundice can signify a more serious problem.

## Causes

This disorder can happen to newborns in which case it is fairly normal as the liver has to suddenly function on its own and it has a few teething problems. In rare cases, excessive amounts of bilirubin can damage the child's brain. So even though it is normally harmless in these cases, it must still be checked out by your doctor.

If the jaundice is the result of a disorder, it is usually more serious. The liver malfunctioning (in the case of cirrhosis) can cause this problem.

Other factors or conditions that can disrupt liver function and lead to jaundice include hepatitis, certain drugs and toxins, pregnancy, and congestive heart failure. In some cases, [gallstones](#) can also cause it.

If jaundice shows up in school-age children or adults, the doctor may take a blood sample to check for liver damage.

## Traditional Treatment

Usually the best way to treat this disorder is to pinpoint the cause. Your doctor will examine you and give you an indication of what is going wrong with your liver.

If your baby has jaundice as a result of an illness he or she will have to be hospitalised and treated accordingly.

Treatment for illness-related jaundice in older children and adults will depend on the cause.

## **Alternative/Natural Treatment**

The underlying cause must be known before any treatment can occur.

**Chinese Herbs** – A Chinese practitioner may treat jaundice with various combinations of herbs. These remedies must be prepared only by a trained professional. A Chinese practitioner may treat jaundice with various combinations of herbs. These remedies must be prepared only by a trained professional.

**Herbal Therapies** – Various herbs, including [dandelion](#) (*Taraxacum officinale*), vervain (*Verbena officinalis*), and [milk thistle](#) (*Silybum marianum*), are used for this complaint.

**Homoeopathy** – A number of homoeopathic remedies are appropriate for treating jaundice; the exact prescription will depend on the underlying cause. Consult a homoeopath for the preparations and dosages that are right for you.

### **When to seek further professional advice**

- You notice jaundice in your infant
- You notice jaundice in yourself, in another adult, or in a school-age child