

What is Jaundice and why it matters:

Jaundice is a yellow discolouration of your skin or eyes and is not a disease by itself but a symptom of serious health problems. Jaundice occurs when there is an excess of **bilirubin** in the bloodstream, causing a yellowish discolouration of the skin and the white of the eyes.

Bilirubin (yellow pigment) is a waste product of expired red blood cells in our bloodstream and is normally processed by our liver. The body might overproduce bilirubin or the liver fails to properly process it due to various reasons like anaemia, liver dysfunction, hepatitis or cirrhosis, bile duct obstruction and certain genetic conditions. This makes the skin and eyes appear yellow.

Jaundiced Eye Normal Eye



Source: *Cleveland Clinic*

Symptoms of Jaundice:

Symptoms of Jaundice can be recognised easily, some vary in degree depending on the severity of the infection.

Yellow eyes & Skin

Loss of appetite

Dark urine or Coloured stool

Fever & Chills

Itchy skin

Symptoms of Jaundice

Weight loss

Feeling irritated

Confusion & Drowsiness

Bruising or Bleeding

Bloody vomit

Harmful consequences of Jaundice:

Jaundice can have physical and psychological effects on individuals. Physically, it can cause fatigue, weakness, abdominal pain and itching. Mentally, it can lead to irritability, difficulty concentrating and emotional distress.

Chronic jaundice, if not managed properly, can increase the risk of developing conditions such as liver disease or liver failure, diabetes, depression and complications in pregnancy. It can also impair the body's immune response, making individuals more susceptible to infections and other illnesses.

Risk Factors of developing Jaundice:

Jaundice can affect people of all ages and backgrounds. It is not contagious itself, but the underlying conditions that cause it can be contagious.

Contagious conditions causing Jaundice:

- [Viral Hepatitis](#) (A, B, C, D, E): These are viral infections that cause inflammation of the liver. They can be spread through different routes like contaminated food and water, and contact with infected blood and body fluids.
- [Yellow fever](#): Viral hemorrhagic disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes
- [Leptospirosis](#): A bacterial infection transmitted through contact with water, soil or food contaminated with the urine, blood, or tissue of infected animals.

Non-contagious causes of Jaundice:

Jaundice can also be caused by other organs like the liver, gallbladder, etc not functional optimally. Overuse of some medicines like paracetamol, steroids etc could also cause it. Chronic liver diseases such as [cirrhosis](#), [autoimmune hepatitis](#) and Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease ([NAFLD](#)) are other common causes. Additionally, genetic factors can play a role in the development of jaundice.

Jaundice is also common in newborns due to the immature liver's inability to efficiently process bilirubin. This type of Jaundice usually resolves on its own and is not typically a cause for concern. ([Neonatal Jaundice](#))

How to diagnose Jaundice:

Diagnosing Jaundice requires an assessment of medical history, a physical examination and a Liver Function Test ([LFT](#)). Imaging studies such as ultrasound, CT scans, or MRI may be used to assess the liver, gallbladder and bile ducts for any damage or blockages.

Identifying and treating Jaundice:

Jaundice treatment depends on its underlying cause and complications.

- If the Jaundice is caused by hepatitis viruses or other liver infections, antiviral medications or other specific treatments may be prescribed.
- Conditions like cirrhosis or liver cancer may require specialised medical management, lifestyle changes or in some cases, liver transplant.
- Surgery or [endoscopic](#) procedures may be needed to remove gallstones or clear blockages in the bile ducts.
- Stopping the medication causing the Jaundice, if possible, and switching to alternative treatments.
- For newborns with Jaundice phototherapy may be used. This involves exposing the baby's skin to special lights that help break down the excess bilirubin.
- In severe cases of liver failure or end-stage liver disease, a liver transplant may be necessary.

How to prevent Jaundice:

Jaundice can be effectively prevented by addressing the underlying cause of these symptoms.

1. Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B infections
2. Lower your risk of hepatitis infection by practising good hygiene, safe sex and not sharing needles for tattoos, piercings or drugs.
3. Reduce alcohol intake to reduce the risk of liver disorders.
4. When travelling to areas with poor sanitation, be extra cautious with food and water to avoid Hepatitis A
5. Eat fruits and vegetables that contain [liver-friendly nutrients](#) such as apples, grapes, cabbage, etc. Drink plenty of water and [juices](#) to help flush out toxins

Jaundice: Symptoms, Risks, Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention

Individuals can protect their liver health and overall well-being by taking proactive steps to understand the symptoms, risks, diagnosis, treatment options and preventive measures for Jaundice.

To Know More:

- [What is Bilirubin and its role in the human body](#)
- [Types of Jaundice](#)
- [How jaundice develops](#)

My Health, My Responsibility