

Class Preparation (Newborn Hepatic):

A mother just delivered a healthy, full-term infant. The mother is concerned because her first child required phototherapy for jaundice. As the nurse, what education would you provide for the mother about jaundice? What instructions are important to explain if the infant requires phototherapy? Are there ways to prevent the infant from developing jaundice?

Jaundice is caused by an elevated level of bilirubin in the blood. Bilirubin is a component of hemoglobin which helps to carry oxygen throughout the baby's body. The yellow appearance of jaundice is the result of a liver that cannot process the amount of bilirubin created by the break down of red blood cells.

If the infant were to require phototherapy, it is important to explain that the maximum amount of skin must be exposed to receive the full benefit of the treatment. In addition, the eyes must be protected from the light to prevent damage.

To prevent jaundice, the most effective method is to feed the newborn 8-12 times per day. Sufficient nutrition will enable the liver to effectively break down the bilirubin. Monitoring for the first bowel movement – meconium – to be passed, can also provide information if the bilirubin is being passed or not.