

Class Preparation (Newborn Hepatic): Dr. Watson

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?

Education: Jaundice is a yellowing of the baby's skin and eyes, and it is caused by excess of a byproduct of red blood cell breakdown called bilirubin. It is common in infants due to their immature liver function, which is responsible for processing bilirubin.

Instructions: Phototherapy is a special blue light that helps the baby's body to break down bilirubin into a form that can be excreted through urine/stool. Baby's eyes must be covered to prevent damage, and baby should only be wearing a diaper to maximize skin exposure to the light. Make sure baby is warm but not overheated and provide frequent feedings to prevent dehydration. Expect loose, greenish stools. Mild redness on skin is common. Breaks from light should only be during diaper changes and feeds.

Prevention: Put baby to breast 10-12 times/day to help baby pass meconium and excrete excess bilirubin, avoid dehydration by making sure baby wakes to feed and has an adequate amount of wet diapers/day. Schedule follow up visit for 2-3 days post discharge from the hospital and monitor at home for changes in skin and eye color, and behavior (sleepier, difficult to wake, not feeding well, dark urine, pale stools).