

Difference Between Icterus and Jaundice

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Key Difference – Icterus vs Jaundice

Jaundice is the yellowish discoloration of mucosal layers of the body. The skin and whites of the eyes become yellowish in this condition. This is caused by increased amounts of bilirubin in the blood. Jaundice is often a sign of an underlying disease process. Although some people assume that icterus and jaundice are two different disease conditions with similar symptoms, icterus is only another name given to jaundice. Therefore there is **no difference between icterus and jaundice**.

What is Icterus?

Icterus is a synonym of jaundice, which is the yellowish discoloration of mucosal layers of the body. There is no difference between icterus and jaundice.

What is Jaundice?

Jaundice is the yellowish discoloration of the mucosal layers of the body. This discoloration is caused by the accumulation of [bilirubin](#). During the [hemolysis](#) of [red blood cells](#), [hemoglobin](#) is broken down into haem and globin components. Haem is converted into biliverdin by the action of haem oxygenase, and it is then converted into [unconjugated bilirubin](#). Unconjugated bilirubin is transported into the liver via blood by binding to [albumin](#) due to its low water solubility. After entering the liver, unconjugated bilirubin is converted into conjugated bilirubin by attaching a water-soluble molecule to it. Then, bilirubin is released into the gut, and the normal flora acts on it to produce stercobilinogen, which later becomes stercobilin. Some part of it is excreted via the kidney as urobilin.



Figure 01: Yellowish Discoloration

Jaundice is categorized into two main subcategories as [physiological jaundice](#) and [pathological jaundice](#).

Jaundice can appear in a healthy newborn due to increased hemolysis and the immaturity of the liver to rapidly metabolize the bilirubin produced during the process. This is known as physiological jaundice. Physiological jaundice usually appears 2-3 days after birth and gradually reaches a peak by one week. It can continue for about 14 days before spontaneously disappearing. Since this is not a disease condition, there is no need for investigations. Phototherapy is sometimes carried out to accelerate the breakdown of bilirubin.



Figure 02: Jaundice phototherapy

Causes

Prehepatic Jaundice

- Hemolytic anemias and other red cell diseases
- Hemoglobinopathies

Posthepatic Jaundice

- Obstruction of the hepatobiliary system
- Damages to the hepatic parenchyma as in cirrhosis

Hepatic Jaundice

- Infections such as [hepatitis B](#)
- Adverse effects of drugs

Investigations

Biochemical studies should be carried out to measure the levels of total bilirubin, indirect and direct bilirubin. Clinicians may go for other appropriate investigations depending on the suspected underlying cause.

Treatment

Management of jaundice varies according to the underlying pathology that gives rise to this condition. Once the cause has been aptly treated and eliminated, jaundice will disappear spontaneously.

What is the Difference Between Icterus and Jaundice?

- Icterus is another name given to jaundice. Therefore there is no difference between the two words.

Summary – Icterus vs Jaundice

Icterus and jaundice are synonyms that are used to describe the rising levels of conjugated or unconjugated bilirubin in the body giving a yellowish tinge to the mucosal layers of the body. Thus, there is no difference between icterus and jaundice.

Reference:

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- 2.Kumar, Parveen J., and Michael L. Clark. Kumar & Clark clinical medicine. Edinburgh: W.B. Saunders, 2009.

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