

Biliary Atresia (BA)

What is Biliary Atresia?

Biliary Atresia (BA) is a rare disease of the bile ducts that affects infants. The bile ducts, which move bile produced in the liver to the small intestines, become blocked soon after birth. The blockage causes the bile to remain in the liver, where it injures the liver cells and leads to inflammation and scarring.

What causes BA?

The cause of BA is unknown.

What are the symptoms of BA?

Symptoms of BA may include jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes), dark-colored urine, pale stools, and swollen abdomen. These symptoms usually appear between two and six weeks after birth.

How is BA diagnosed?

The evaluation of biliary atresia must occur in a time-sensitive manner. Testing may include blood work (specifically direct bilirubin), ultrasound, liver biopsy, and imaging of the bile ducts (either by radiology or surgery).

How is BA treated?

The first treatment option for BA is usually a surgery called the Kasai procedure. During this operation, the surgeon removes damaged bile ducts and re-connects a piece of intestine to drain the bile. In infants for whom this procedure is successful, the jaundice will resolve over months. If the Kasai is not an option or the Kasai procedure is not successful, a liver transplant will ultimately be needed.

Managing BA

Your healthcare team will follow your child's growth and development, and monitor for signs of liver disease. If bile flow is reduced, then your child may need a special formula and/or vitamin supplementation. Children with BA will need to be monitored throughout their lives and may still need a liver transplant at some point in their lives.

BA clinical trials

Clinical trials are research studies that test how well new medical treatments work in people. Speak with your doctor about the ongoing progress of these trials as they relate to BA.

To learn more about biliary atresia simply scan this QR code or view all of our free resources available in our Resource Center: liverfoundation.org/resource-center.

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For questions about liver wellness and disease, or for emotional support to patients at the point of crisis and information on local resources including physician referrals, please contact our Helpline at 1-800-465-4837.

