

NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME

Parent/Family Education



Children's
MINNESOTA

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ABOUT NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (also called NAS), refers to symptoms of withdrawal that babies may sometimes develop after birth if their mothers have taken medications or drugs during their pregnancy that can be addictive.

CAUSE OF SYMPTOMS

Many drugs used by mothers can reach the baby while they are in the womb. Once the baby is born, the baby can no longer receive the drug from their mother's body, and their own body may begin to react with symptoms known as withdrawal. There are many drugs that can cause this reaction but some of the most common are:

- **Narcotics:** methadone, morphine, Oxycodone, Percocet (acetaminophen and Oxycodone), and Vicodin (acetaminophen and hydrocodone)
- **Muscle relaxants:** Valium (diazepam), Ativan (lorazepam) and Xanax
- **Other potentially addictive drugs:** cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and methamphetamine

It is very important that you let your nurse and doctor know about any drugs used during your pregnancy. This will help your caregivers to give appropriate medicines to you and your baby, deliver the best care, and discharge your baby home as soon as safely possible after birth.

We cannot predict which babies will have NAS. The amount of drugs or medicines that the baby receives in the womb does not always match the symptoms that each baby may have after they are born.

WHEN SYMPTOMS OCCUR

Most infants begin to have symptoms of withdrawal between 2-3 days after their birth. However, some infants may have them earlier and others may not have them until up to 10 days of age. These symptoms may be mild and go away quickly or may continue for months.

Some things that can affect how long it takes for symptoms to develop include:

- How long the medication or drug is active in the mother
- How recently the medication or drug was taken before the baby's birth
- Whether other medications or drugs were used at the same time

Tests that might be done to measure the presence of the drug in the baby's system include testing drug levels in the first stool (called meconium). Tests might also be done on a sample of the baby's urine.

SYMPTOMS OF NAS

Some common withdrawal symptoms you may see in your baby are:

- Irritability
- Jitteriness
- Frequent crying (may be high pitched)
- Vigorous sucking on a pacifier
- Sweating
- Diarrhea
- Stuffy nose
- Fever
- Difficulty feeding
- Trouble sleeping
- Fast breathing
- Vomiting
- Frequent yawning and sneezing
- Stiff arms, legs and back
- Seizures

Infants that have NAS usually have several of the symptoms, not just one. You will notice that some of these are symptoms of other problems such as colds or infections. For this reason, it is important to discuss your baby's symptoms with your doctor or nurse.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR BABY

While you are in the hospital, being a part of your baby's care is important. Being near your baby as much as possible will help you get to know your baby faster and will also be comforting to your baby. During this time, hospital staff will teach you to recognize normal behavior as well as abnormal symptoms or behavior so that you can report them to a doctor if necessary once you go home. In the hospital you will learn some common actions that can be helpful to your baby if he or she is experiencing withdrawal.

Ways to comfort a baby that is experiencing withdrawal symptoms include:

- Keep lights and sound low
- Hold baby skin to skin
- Use gentle touch
- Speak softly
- Swaddle your baby with their hands close to their mouth
- Limit visitors
- Offer breast/bottle feeding and a pacifier often
- Gentle, slow rocking in an upright position
- Allow more time for feedings if needed

RESOURCES AT CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA

Primary care clinics

Learn where our clinics are located by visiting childrensMN.org/primarycare.

Breastfeeding resource center

Minneapolis: 612-863-4638
St. Paul: 651-241-6250

Family Resource Center library

Minneapolis: 612-813-6816
St. Paul: 651-220-6368

More information on Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome is available at childrensMN.org/educationmaterials/NAS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR INFANT CARE

- **Minnesota Parents Know** — parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/newborn
- **March of Dimes** — marchofdimes.org
- **Healthy Children** — healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Hotline** — 1-800-662-4357 and samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

HOSPITAL CARE AND TREATMENT

There are different levels of care available in the nurseries within hospitals. Your doctor will decide which nursery is best for your baby. Some babies may be kept in the mother's room after being born. Other infants need frequent observations by specially trained staff and may need to go to a special nursery to be watched more closely. Regardless of the type of nursery your baby is admitted to, staff will try to keep you and your baby together as much as possible.

Babies that have withdrawal symptoms use a lot of energy that should otherwise be used to help them grow and develop normally. If they need treatment but do not receive it, they may fail to sleep or eat well, fail to gain weight, and can also become sick. Some babies can also have very serious symptoms such as seizures. The goal for treating your baby is to decrease your baby's symptoms so that they can grow and develop normally, and go home as soon as it is safe.

Some babies stay in the hospital for less than one week. Other babies have more severe withdrawal symptoms and need to stay longer. While your baby is in the hospital, staff will observe your baby frequently to watch their symptoms. When babies have symptoms of withdrawal, a scoring system is used by staff to help them decide how severe the symptoms are. If your baby begins to have high scores and does not respond to comfort measures, your baby's doctor may decide to give him or her medication to help decrease withdrawal symptoms so that your baby remains safe and comfortable. Common medications used to reduce NAS symptoms include methadone or morphine.

Babies that need medication in the hospital often need to continue taking it once they go home. Before your baby goes home, staff will teach you how to carefully observe your baby for withdrawal symptoms, how to give medications if your baby needs them, and let you know who you can call if you have questions.

BREASTFEEDING

Every situation is different. While it will be safe for most babies to breastfeed, your doctor and lactation consultants can help to determine if breastfeeding is safe for your baby. They can also help you to create a long term plan that is best for your situation.

If you have been told that you can breastfeed your baby safely, it is important that you know that stopping breastfeeding suddenly may increase your baby's withdrawal symptoms. Before you stop, you should discuss with your doctor how to safely wean your baby from breastfeeding.

CARE AT HOME

Once your baby is home, symptoms of withdrawal may still continue for several weeks. These symptoms will gradually decrease over time. Getting plenty of rest for you and your baby can help to reduce stress for both of you.

Your baby will also need close follow up care in the clinic or with home care visits to evaluate the baby's growth, observe your baby for symptoms of withdrawal, adjust medication doses as necessary and give you an opportunity to ask questions about your baby.

Copies of this brochure, as well as information regarding opiate use during pregnancy, can be downloaded for printing at childrensMN.org/neonatalabstinenccesynndrome