

Caring for Your Baby with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

What is neonatal abstinence syndrome?

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) happens when a baby who was exposed to drugs or medicines through his or her mother's blood during pregnancy no longer gets them after he or she is born. Babies who have NAS have symptoms of withdrawal from the drugs or medicines.

Most babies of mothers who used drugs or medicines during pregnancy get NAS; and withdrawal symptoms usually show up within the first few hours or days after birth.

Some babies have NAS when a mother takes only a small amount of drugs, while other babies may only have NAS when a mother takes large amounts of drugs or medicines.

What are the symptoms of NAS?

The most common symptoms of NAS are:

- crying for long periods of time
- being fussy and difficult to comfort
- shaking in the arms or legs (tremors)
- not being able to sleep well
- stuffy nose
- sneezing or yawning a lot
- having a hard time feeding and sucking

- stiff muscles in the arms, legs, or back
- poor weight gain
- throwing up and diarrhea
- breathing fast
- fever and sweating
- redness or scratches on the elbows, knees, or chin.

If NAS is not treated or gets really bad, it may lead to more serious symptoms, such as seizures.

When do the symptoms show up and how long is a baby with NAS in the hospital?

The first symptoms of withdrawal may appear within the first hours or days after birth. Babies with NAS will need to be watched closely in the hospital for at least 5 to 7 days. Infants who need medicine for NAS may need to stay in the hospital for several weeks or more. Most babies continue to have mild symptoms of withdrawal for 4 to 6 months after leaving the hospital.

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How are withdrawal symptoms treated?

Tell the health care team about all drugs used while you were pregnant. This will help the team provide the right treatment for your baby.

Your baby's health care team will watch your baby very closely and will rank the symptoms using a special chart that helps measure withdrawal symptoms. This will help the team know how strong the symptoms are and the best way to treat them.

To help keep your baby comfortable, all babies with NAS get special care that includes:

- swaddling in a blanket
- holding and rocking
- feeding and burping very often
- being in a quiet room without loud noises
- turning the lights off in the room
- limiting visitors and activity in the room
- offering a pacifier.

Your baby will feel better by the time he or she leaves the hospital, but may continue to have mild symptoms.

How can I help my baby?

Many people are part of the team taking care of your baby. You are an important part of that team! We encourage you to be involved in your baby's daily care by feeding, diapering, and comforting your baby during fussy periods.

Try to create a peaceful environment by keeping the room dark, turning the TV off, and setting the telephone ringer on low. Nursing care and other activities should be scheduled around feeding times to give your baby a chance to sleep better.

Take care of yourself by following your doctor's orders and staying involved in your treatment program.

Breastfeeding may be an option, depending on the medicines you are taking. If you want to breastfeed, ask your health care team about it. The decision to breastfeed your baby will be made by you and the health care team.

There is not a lot of research about how well a baby with NAS will grow and develop over time. However, your love and care can make a big difference for the baby now and in the future.

If you have any questions, ask your health care team. We are here to help you and your baby.