



Parent Information Sheet: Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

What is neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)?

NAS is a group of symptoms or problems that a baby develops after exposure to certain medications or drugs while in his/her mother's womb. Neonatal abstinence syndrome is another phrase for infant drug withdrawal.

Why do babies get NAS?

During pregnancy, a special organ, the placenta, connects mother and baby. Any drugs the mother takes, the baby also "takes" as the mother and baby share a blood supply through the placenta. When the baby is born, he/she no longer is exposed to the mother's medication or drug. Because the baby isn't getting the drug anymore, he/she is now "going cold turkey". This can lead to infant withdrawal. Withdrawal can occur within a few hours to a few days after birth.

Do all exposed babies go through withdrawal (NAS)?

No; however, it is not possible to tell which babies after birth will have withdrawal symptoms or how long the symptoms will last. A baby who experiences withdrawal will need to stay in the hospital for as short as a few days or possibly as long as a few weeks. During the baby's hospital stay, he/she will be treated with medicines to help lessen the withdrawal symptoms.

How can I help my baby?

While medicines may be needed to help a withdrawing baby, nothing can replace a family's love and comfort. The hospital staff will help you learn ways of soothing your baby.

What if I have questions?

Ask, ask, ask!! There are many team members caring for your baby -- doctors, nurses, social workers, physical therapists., and YOU. Parenting a newborn can be exciting, overwhelming, and tiring. Parenting a baby with withdrawal can be even more so. Ask, ask, ask any questions you have!!

What are some symptoms of withdrawal in babies?

- Jitteriness or severe trembling
- Overactive sucking
- Difficult to console or quiet down
- High-pitched cry
- Diarrhea
- Fever, sweating
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Poor Feeding
- Sneezing or stuffy nose
- Yawning a lot
- Severe diaper rash
- In severe cases, seizures



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Parent Information Sheet: Things Parents Can Do to Provide Comfort to their Babies with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

Ways to help decrease stimulation to your baby:

- Dim lights in the room if infant is in a crib
- Cover isolette if baby is in an isolette
- Decrease any noise in the room
- Use slow, gentle handling methods

How to help your baby learn to self-soothe:

- Pacifier use
- Swaddling/ wrapping in blanket or sleep sack
- Sleeping on his/her belly (ONLY while infant is experiencing withdrawal – at home, your baby should sleep on his/her back at all times)

Other things to do:

- Skin to skin holding
- Use of a swing
- Use of a warm blanket
- Soothing music
- Gently rocking baby while holding the baby in an upright (head up) position
- Rubbing the baby's back for burping rather than patting his/her back.

Other techniques for
calming withdrawing
babies



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