

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

A Guide for
Families



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*Disclaimer: The images of people used in this booklet are for visual representations only.



Congratulations on the birth of your new baby!

This is a happy time for you, but all parents face challenges in their baby's first year. Some babies need extra loving, including those born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). NAS is similar to medicine or drug withdrawal in adults. It happens when the baby is born and is suddenly cut off from the medicines or drugs in the mother's body. Within 1 to 5 days, the baby may start to show signs that something is wrong.

It's hard to know which babies will have NAS. Some babies will have it even though their mothers only took small doses of medicines for a brief time during pregnancy. Others may show signs because their mothers took large amounts of drugs for a long time while pregnant. No matter the reason, this guide was written to help you learn about NAS and how to help your baby be healthy.

What is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)?

When will my baby show signs of NAS?

Most babies show signs of withdrawal, or NAS, between 1 and 5 days after birth. The time it takes for signs to show can depend on how much and what kind of medicine or drug the baby's mother took and for how long. It also can depend on whether or not the baby's mother used other kinds of substances as well, such as alcohol, tobacco, or additional medicines.

It is very important to tell your nurse and your baby's doctors about all medicines and drugs used during your pregnancy.

This will help them treat your baby.

What will happen if my baby is in withdrawal?

Beginning soon after your baby's birth, nurses will check for certain signs in your baby and give him or her a "score" depending on which NAS signs are present or not. Your baby will be scored every few hours until he or she is ready to go home. The scoring helps doctors decide which types of treatment your baby needs to get better. The nurses will explain the scoring to you. If something is not clear, please ask for more information until your questions are answered.

What are the signs of NAS?

- High-pitched cries or crankiness
- Stiff arms, legs, and back
- Trouble sleeping
- Shaking, jitters, or lots of sucking
- Not eating well or problems sucking
- Vomiting due to overeating or crankiness
- Fast breathing and/or stuffy nose
- Sneezing or yawning a lot
- Irritation on diaper area due to loose, watery stools
- Irritation on face, back of head, arms, and/or legs due to restlessness
- Poor weight gain after a few days of life
- Seizures (Also called convulsions, they are hard to spot and can last seconds or minutes. Your baby may suddenly start jerking his or her arms and legs or may go stiff. You may also see eye rolling, staring, lip smacking, sucking, or a change in skin color.) Seizures are a late sign of NAS.



Treatment for Babies with NAS— Love, Hugs and Care

If your baby is showing signs of withdrawal, loving and caring may be some of the best medicine. The combination of loving, hugging, holding your baby close and, in some cases, medicine can help your baby.

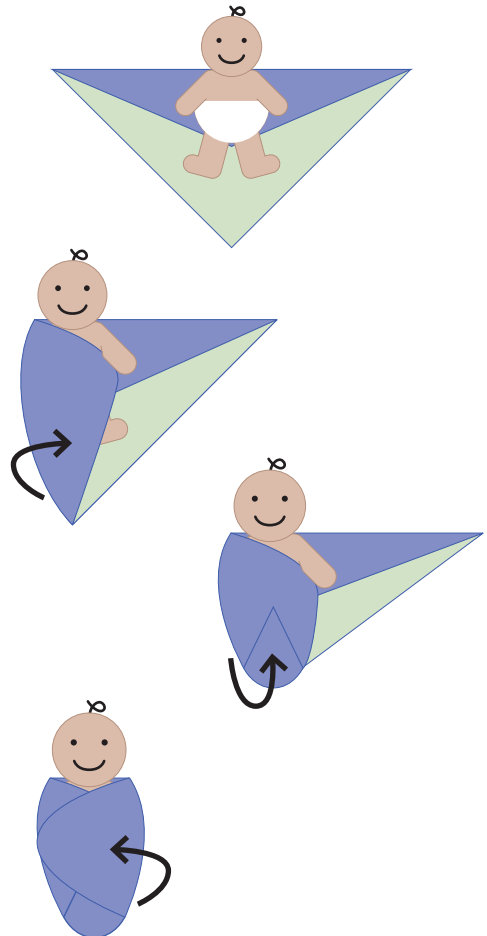
How can I help my baby?

Whether or not your baby needs medicine, you can help your baby by:

- Staying close to your baby
- Continually holding and swaddling your baby
- Making skin-to-skin contact with your baby
- Feeding your baby whenever he or she looks hungry
- Keeping things quiet and calm around your baby (few visitors, no noise, no bright lights)
- Breastfeeding

Your nurse can help you learn how to swaddle your baby if you want to practice or do not know how. If you have any questions at all, please ask.

How to swaddle your baby



Does my baby need medicine to get better?

If your baby has many strong signs of withdrawal, your doctor may give him or her medicine to help. The medicines that babies with NAS are given most often are morphine and methadone. Sometimes other medicines may be added to help your baby during this time. Your doctor or nurse can explain your babies' medication in more detail.

What happens if my baby is given medicine for NAS?

- Medicines like Morphine or Methadone will help your baby be calm and comfortable.
- Medicines will reduce your baby's risk of having seizures.
- As your baby starts to get better, the dose of medicine will slowly be lowered, and then stopped.

How long will my baby need treatment?

NAS can last from one week up to many weeks. It is hard to know how long it will last. The length of withdrawal depends on the medicines or drugs—and the amounts— your baby was exposed to during pregnancy.



If advised by your physician: Breastfeeding may help your baby. It is generally safe for mothers to breastfeed if they are in a stable treatment program, even if you are taking medicine given to you by a doctor or nurse—and even if the medicine is for drug withdrawal. Breastfeeding is not safe for mothers who are not in a treatment program, or who are using alcohol or illegal drugs. Talk to your doctor about breastfeeding and the medicines you may be taking. Talk to your doctor about treatment options for opiate addiction.

When can my baby leave the hospital?

Babies who do not need medication to control NAS may stay in the hospital for up to a week. Many babies who need medication for NAS stay in the hospital up to 3-4 weeks, and rarely some may stay longer. It all depends on how your baby responds to treatment.

During your baby's hospital stay, the NAS signs will lessen. Your baby will be discharged when there is little risk for serious problems.

What to Expect When Your Baby Leaves the Hospital

Parent and family support can make a big difference in how fast a baby with NAS gets better. Babies can continue to have mild symptoms of withdrawal for up to 6 months after leaving the hospital.

Once at home, your baby may continue to experience the following:

- Problems feeding
- Slow weight gain
- Crankiness
- Sleep problems
- Sneezing, stuffy nose, and trouble breathing

Your baby's doctor and nurse will teach you ways to take care of your baby. They also will show you how you can help your baby if he or she is having any of the problems listed above. Practice caring for your baby while you are in the hospital so you are more comfortable at home.

Asking questions helps you help your baby

If you have any questions or concerns about your baby when you are at home, or if something just does not seem right, talk to your baby's doctor or nurse. It is important to feel comfortable taking care of your baby, and asking questions—any questions helps you help your baby.





When baby comes home, the journey continues

Remember, babies cry a lot and babies with NAS tend to cry more often and easily. Helping yourself and managing your stress will help you care for your baby.

- Settle into a quiet, low-lit room to feed your baby.
- Gently rock or sway your baby to calm him or her. (Do not walk or sway your baby while feeding).
- If you feel upset, walk away and take deep breaths for a few minutes.
- Never shake your baby or put anything over your baby's face to quiet your baby.
- Call a family member, friend, or your baby's doctor or nurse if you feel upset, angry, scared, or just need help. Everyone needs help sometimes.



Ways to Support and Care for Your Baby

Parents and caregivers of a baby with NAS can help the baby get better. Here are some things you can do:

Make your baby comfortable by setting up a routine, letting few people visit, talking softly, keeping the room quiet and dim (turn off the TV or radio, turn your phone down or off, and turn down the lights).

Let your baby sleep as long as needed and without being woken up suddenly.

Make feeding time quiet and calm, and burp your baby often.

Learn to spot your baby's "I am upset" signs, whether he or she is yawning, sneezing, shaking, crying, or frowning. Also know the signs that say your baby is happy, hungry, or relaxed.

When your baby is upset, stop what you are doing, hold your baby skin-to-skin or gently swaddle him or her in a blanket on your chest. Let your baby calm down before trying anything new, or gently sway or rock your baby.

Gently and slowly introduce new things to your baby one at a time.

As your baby becomes calmer for longer periods of time, start checking to see if he or she might like to have the blanket wrapped more loosely or taken off sometimes.



Tips for Caring for Babies Going Through Withdrawal

- Loving and learning to spot your baby's needs goes a long way.
- Take care of yourself—take breaks, ask others for help sometimes—so you can be there when your baby really needs you.
- Follow all of the doctor's directions for taking care of your baby and yourself.
- If you are in a drug treatment program, stay as long as your doctor says. If your doctor says you need to be in one, go.
- Keep things calm and quiet around your baby.
- Swaddle, gently rock or sway, or use skin-to-skin contact with your baby.
- Talk to your baby softly and gently.

Key Contacts

My doctor's name and contact information:

My nurse's name and contact information:

Other contacts:

Taking care of your baby also means taking care of yourself, from following your doctor's orders to keeping up your treatment plan.

Please remember, we are here to help you and your family!

Notes

Babies use their bodies and voices to communicate all the time. Write down the things that seem to make your baby happy and unhappy. Also, note the best ways to calm your baby.

How do I know when my baby is unhappy?

How do I know when my baby is happy?

What seems to relax my baby?

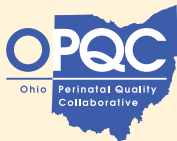
How else can I help my baby?



**You play an important role in helping
your baby get better.**

Pay attention to your baby's needs.

Helping your baby stay calm and comfortable is some of the best medicine he or she will ever receive. If you have any questions, ask your doctor or nurse.



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