

Your Health Education

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) Information for New Mothers

This handout is for new mothers to help you learn about NAS and how to help your baby be healthy.

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.

It is 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.

When will my baby show signs of NAS?

Most babies show signs of withdrawal, or NAS, between 1 and 7 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
- Loose or watery stools
- Irritation on chin, back of head, elbows, and/or knees 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.
- Fever
- Sweating

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?

- One of the best things you can do for your baby is be present and involved in your baby's care
- Staying close to your baby
- Continually holding and swaddling your baby
- Making skin-to-skin contact with your baby
- Keeping things quiet and calm around your baby (few visitors, no noise, no bright lights)
- Breastfeeding

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- You play an important role in helping your baby get well. This means letting your baby sleep in a dark, quiet, and peaceful place. Pacifiers are helpful in comforting your baby. Rest is one of the most important things for your baby. Avoid waking baby and having a lot of visitors.

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.

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. If the baby has 3 scores \geq 8 or averaging \geq 8 the doctor will be called to see the baby. The doctor will decide if the baby needs help in withdrawing, the baby will be transfer to the NICU team if baby needs help. The medicine that babies with NAS are given most often is morphine. Sometimes other medicines may be added to help your baby during this time. Your doctor or nurse can explain your baby's medication in more detail.

What happens if my baby is given medicine for NAS?

- Medicines will help your baby be calm and comfortable.
- Medicines will reduce your baby's risk of having seizures.
- Medicine is given by mouth to baby.
- 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 be in the hospital for up to a week. Babies that need medication to control NAS will stay longer. The length of your baby's stay depends on how your baby responds to treatment. The NAS signs and symptoms will lessen during your baby's hospital stay. Your baby will stay in the hospital 24 - 48 hours after the last dose of medication is given, for observation. Many babies who need medication for NAS, stay in the hospital up to 3-4 weeks, and sometimes may stay longer. When NAS scores are stable and there is little risk for serious problems, your baby will be discharged.

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 and/or stuffy nose

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 to become more comfortable.

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.

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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.

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.

Attention Magee Hospital families: Leaving Magee:

When you leave the hospital your baby may be in the nursery on 3700 (3rd floor), POD G, or POD F (on 2nd floor).

If the baby needs medication, then the baby will be in the NICU nurseries which are PODs A, B, C, D, & E (on the 1st floor), PODs F & G (on the 2nd floor), or POD H (on the 3rd floor).

Phone number is 412-641-4420. You will be connected to the nurse caring for your baby.

At other UPMC hospitals, your nurse will provide the nursery number for you to call with questions.