

Your Health Education

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) Information for Pregnant Women

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

What is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)?

NAS is a term for the group of problems or symptoms a newborn experiences when withdrawing from certain medications such as methadone, suboxone, or other legal and illegal drugs.

Most drugs taken by an expectant mother pass through the placenta and directly into the developing baby.

Substances that can cause dependence in the mother do the same thing to the fetus.

At birth, the newborn's dependence continues, but the drug is no longer available, resulting in symptoms of withdrawal.

Is there anything I can do while I am pregnant?

Listen to your obstetrician, midwife, or other medical care provider.

Do not change or stop your medication or drug except as instructed by your medical provider. Do not act on your own.

Your obstetrics provider can refer you to our neonatologists for more information in the prenatal consultation.

Strongly consider breastfeeding if your baby's physician determines that it's safe while you are taking your medication.

Taking good care of yourself is the best way to take good care of your baby.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms depend on the type of substance taken by the mother, the last time it was used, and whether the baby is full term or early. It's hard to predict which babies will be affected or how much. Symptoms can begin within 1 to 10 days after birth, but usually first occur within 3 to 5 days.

The most common symptoms are:

- Tremors or jitteriness
- Irritability
- Disturbed patterns of sleeping and waking
- High-pitched cry
- Tight muscle tone
- Sweating, fever, or unstable temperature
- Sneezing, stuffy, or runny nose
- Increased appetite and sucking needs
- Poor feeding and ineffective sucking
- Weight loss
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or dehydration
- Seizures

Urine or stool specimens are taken, and any symptoms your baby has will be assessed at least every 4 hours using a scoring system called a Finnegan score.

Diagnosis is based on how the score changes over time, instead of any single assessment.

This scoring system will help the physician assess your baby's need for treatment.

What is the treatment?

All symptomatic infants receive conservative treatment including a comfortable, quiet environment, dim lighting, minimal stimulation, and calming techniques like holding, slow rocking, and skin-to-skin contact.

Some infants require additional therapy with medication. The neonatologist (newborn specialist physician) will decide if medication is necessary.

The nurses and hospital staff know that this can be a stressful and emotional time for you. They can help you find supportive resources for yourself and for your newborn. If you need help, just ask.

What to expect after delivery?

Your baby will need to be observed in the hospital for 5 to 7 days, even though you may be discharged sooner.

If your baby is having high scores, he or she will have to stay in the hospital longer for treatment.

After discharge, your baby will need to see his/her primary care provider, pediatrician, or family doctor within 1 to 3 days to discuss your baby's overall health, and any additional recommendations.

Your baby may still be easily over stimulated, irritable or difficult to console. Continue to hold baby, provide skin-to skin contact, and a calm environment.